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‘Operation Enduring Nightmare’?

A Strategic Critique of the Military Intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 – October 2008

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I hereby declare that I have read and understood the regulations governing the submission of M. SocSc. dissertations, including those relating to length and plagiarism, as contained in the rules of this University, and that this dissertation conforms to those regulations.

Signed by candidate

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“As for the United States' future in Afghanistan, it will be fire and hell and total defeat, God willing, as it was for their predecessors - the Soviets and, before them, the British. Afghans have a history of expelling their enemies as no enemy and invader has quit Afghanistan willingly.”

Mohammed Omar

Map of Afghanistan



Abstract

In October 2011, the war in Afghanistan reached its ignominious ten year anniversary. As the conflict rolls on relentlessly, observers from across all disciplines, and indeed the general public themselves, have attempted to identify why the intervention, which began as Operation Enduring Freedom, has instead become an ‘Enduring Nightmare’. The following dissertation attempts to provide empirical reasoning to this question by means of a literature review of the established strategic critiques of the intervention between the years of October 2001 and October 2008. Through this methodological approach this dissertation hypothesises that the failings behind the intervention into Afghanistan stem from a fundamental inconsistency of the strategic design by which inadequate strategic ‘means’ were employed to meet unachievable strategic ‘ends’. As such, the intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 to October 2008 will serve as a valuable lesson of the West’s inability to apply a strategic model to accomplish successful policy outcomes in complex asymmetric warfare and nation-building.

Introduction

When Jordan West heard about the events of September 11th 2001 he was sitting in a mathematics class in his Yorkshire primary school propelling paper aeroplanes across the room to the frustration of his teacher. Jordan was then nine years old, lived over three thousand miles away from New York City and had never even heard of Afghanistan.¹ However in April 2011 Rifleman Jordan West became the youngest member of a British infantry platoon deployed to Afghanistan to take part in a conflict that began before Jordan considered ‘war’ as anything other than a playground amusement. Operation Enduring Freedom, which began in Afghanistan in October 2001, has now surpassed its inauspicious 10 year anniversary. Few will be inclined to celebrate.

Despite a decade’s worth of endeavours to counter terrorism, eliminate insurgency and create stability, Afghanistan remains a war zone. The writ of the corrupt Afghan government is in a state of abeyance while aid efforts have failed to hoist the people of Afghanistan from poverty and destitution. Perhaps most notably, Islamic terrorism, which catalysed the intervention in the first place, remains as credible a threat as it was on the eve of September 10th. For these reasons, soldiers like Jordan West are still being asked to risk their lives in the perilous terrain of Afghanistan. For the U.S. and her allies, Operation Enduring Freedom has instead become an ‘Enduring Nightmare’.

Statement of Purpose

As the conflict rolls on remorselessly, critics of the intervention strategy in Afghanistan have been numerous and at times scathing. This dissertation seeks to identify the various strategic critiques of the intervention in Afghanistan between October 2001 and October 2008.

Although this dissertation stops its analysis at this juncture, the reader is all too aware that the conflict in Afghanistan is still active. The reasoning behind the decision to confine the margins of analysis to a specific period is to establish how strategic failures between 2001 and 2008 enabled the conflict to become protracted prior to the current state of affairs. Even though a multidimensional conflict that stretches over a decade is invariably of a polymorphous disposition, during this analysis three palpable strategic phases to the conflict are noted. The first strategic phase involved the invasion and overthrow of the Taliban government in the aftermath

¹ Private Jordan West, in discussion with author, 20 August 2010.

of 9/11. The second phase refers to the nation-building agenda in Afghanistan during which the strategic priority became Iraq. For convenience sake we identify this period as formally coming into being after President Bush's State of the Union Address in January 2003. The transformation from the second to the third, and also the current phase, is defined by the elevation of Afghanistan to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. In practice this was symbolised by the promotion of General David Patraeus to CENTCOM on October 31st 2008 after previously commanding Multi-National Force in Iraq.²

Although analysis of the current strategic phase has stimulated rigorous debate among commentators, this dissertation assumes hindsight enables a stronger foundation for empirical type research. Given that the full implications of this phase of the strategy are yet to be realised, a conclusive critique is neither possible nor appropriate. Consequently this analysis elects to focus exclusively on strategy that has come to pass. Nevertheless, by identifying the major strategic critiques of the intervention over the period between October 2001 and October 2008, it becomes clear how strategic failings have contributed to Afghanistan becoming the current intractable beast of burden for the U.S. and her allies.³

'Strategy' as a Concept

For the purpose of this dissertation the broad definition of 'strategy' offered by Mackubin Thomas Owens is more than sufficient: "*Strategy describes the way in which the available means will be employed to achieve the ends of policy*".⁴ Even though this definition is straightforward enough, the components of strategy are conceptually more complex. Contrary to classical interpretations, strategy is no longer restricted to the military domain and now incorporates many non-military processes. Economic, political and social means may be employed in the pursuit of strategic objectives. Additionally, strategy is no longer considered to be limited to the single level of operational analysis. While there is debate over the various 'realms' of strategic study, this dissertation assumes that the broad notion of 'strategy' has three levels.

At the highest level is the conception of a 'grand strategy'. According to one definition 'grand strategy' refers to the integration of "*military, political, and economic means to pursue states' ultimate*

² CENTCOM refers to the United States Military Central Command.

³ For the sake of convenience throughout the rest of this dissertation the United States and her allies will be referred to as the 'Coalition'. Since 9/11 the term 'Coalition' has been used as a collective reference to multiple nations who conducted joint military action in Afghanistan. Although explicit interests may differ among Coalition partners, for the most part the Coalition in Afghanistan shares broad mutual strategic objectives.

⁴ Mackubin Thomas Owens, 'Strategy and the Strategic Way of Thinking', *Naval War College Review* 60:4 (2007), p.111.

objectives in the international system".⁵ In this sense 'grand strategy' is a reference to the overarching interests and objectives - national policy. In the context of the intervention in Afghanistan, the 'grand strategy' refers to the broad security of the United States and her Coalition partners.

The second realm of strategy, and the principal level of analysis for this dissertation, can be described as 'operational strategy'. Operational strategy refers to the planning, implementation and other constituent means by which an operation is designed to achieve the objectives of the 'grand strategy'.⁶ In the case of this dissertation, the operational strategy refers to the implementation of the intervention in the theatre of Afghanistan.

The final realm of strategy is the tactical level. This refers to the tools which are employed during the actualisation of 'operational strategy'; the stage where strategic theory engages with reality in practice.⁷ Tactics broadly refer to anything from a unit's decision to call in air support to the chosen tone in a diplomat's voice when he addresses a counterpart. Together these three levels of strategy are interlinked they form part of an organic whole which links national policy to any singular action in a given campaign.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this dissertation takes the style of a literature survey based on the established criticisms of intervention in Afghanistan. This approach will enable the reader to identify the key strategic issues facing military intervention in Afghanistan from October 2001 to October 2008. More generally it will reveal the significance behind the strategic art of enabling realistic 'means' to meet achievable 'ends' and, perhaps more significantly, the perilous consequences of neglecting this fundamental notion of strategic thinking.

Our sources vary from politicians at the highest level of the policy making process to academics, journalists and professional observers on the ground. Although this implies considerable diversity of sources, the literature reviewed all aspires to provide reliable knowledge on the intervention in Afghanistan which can be used for the purpose of strategic assessment. Logically, because of the critical analytical nature of this dissertation, the bulk of material comes from the academic community and journalists. As the conflict in Afghanistan is still operational there is a large amount of material, frequently emotive, which includes personal histories, interviews and pressure group publications. This type of material is excluded from this

⁵ Stephen D. Biddle, 'American Grand Strategy after 9/11: An Assessment', *Strategic Studies Institute* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), p.v.

⁶ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.31-38.

⁷ J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., 'A Survey of the Theory of Strategy', in *Theory of War and Strategy*, ed. by J. Boone Bartholomees Jr. (U.S. Army War College, June 2008), p.13.

dissertation because it is not inherently strategic in nature and may be considered subjective or unreliable.

Nevertheless the remaining pool of information that fits into this methodological criterion is vast. As such, this dissertation is focused on the case of Afghanistan and cannot expand on 'grand strategic' critiques that are not directly associated with the intervention itself. Additionally, a complete critique that covers all the possible dynamics at the tactical level of analysis would be an enormous task and warrants a far more substantial study than there is space for here. For these reasons the bulk of this dissertation's analysis is related to the operational level. Additionally, although this paper identifies the key strategic issues at the operational level it does not seek to cover all the nuanced factors at work and, as a consequence, a more complete analysis would be able to expand on the discussions, advance on other examples and cite other commentators.

Chapter Outline

In compliance with the methodological approach to this dissertation, this dissertation is structured periodically. As an essential prologue to a strategic assessment in any given campaign, Chapter 1 considers the geography, politics and social landscape of Afghanistan. In order to connect strategic theory to practice, Chapter 1 also contains a history of Afghanistan with particular reference to past interventions.

Equipped with an understanding of Afghanistan's strategic context, in Chapter 2 this dissertation embarks on a study of the first strategic phase of the current intervention. This chapter is entitled 'Now the Taliban will pay a price';⁸ a quote from President Bush in the aftermath of 9/11 after launching the intervention into Afghanistan with the strategic objectives of overthrowing the Taliban regime and bringing al Qaeda to justice.

In Chapter 3, entitled 'Steadfast in our process, now we press on',⁹ we investigate the strategy employed after the Taliban regime collapsed, nation-building had commenced and the grand strategy had shifted towards Iraq and the wider 'War on Terror'. The strategic objective under scrutiny in this chapter is the recognised 'modus operandi' of nation-building operations - political development, capitalisation on security and social development.

⁸ George Bush, comment on "President Bush Launches Attack on Afghanistan", *About.com: Middle East Issues* (2001), <<http://middleeast.about.com/od/afghanistan/qt/me081007b.htm>> [accessed 10 March 2010].

⁹ George Bush, comment on "Bush State of the Union Address", *CNN* (29 January 2002) <<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>> [accessed 23 September 2010].

After identifying the principal strategic critiques from these two phases, the conclusion summarises the central themes to this dissertation while identifying what the established critiques reveal about strategy in the modern world and the contribution of strategic critiques in general. In doing so, this dissertation aspires to provide some strategic reasoning as to why the intervention in Afghanistan became an 'Enduring Nightmare'.

University of Cape Town

Chapter 1

Background to the Intervention in Afghanistan

In both the planning of strategy and its analysis, the methodology often begins with referral to a map, accompanied by a revision of the history books. While politics and policy alters and shifts, geography is a constant and inflexible variable. Because of this characteristic, regardless of the numerous strategies and tactics employed in an intervention, the implications of geography are frequently found to be the defining factor. In Afghanistan, as with many recurring conflict prone territories, history has routinely confirmed this reality.

For these reasons, this background overview is required to contextualise the intervention strategy within the strategic environment in which it was implemented. The focus of this chapter is on the country's natural and human geography as well as a reference to more recent past conflicts. By beginning with this essential methodological process, the strategy of intervention can be considered alongside the constant variables that have unsparingly defined Afghanistan.

The Natural Geography of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an entirely landlocked country of mostly mountainous terrain contrasted with vast plains in the north and south-west. It borders with Pakistan to the south-east, Iran to the west and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and China to the north. The climate is arid to semi-arid which plays host to extreme weather conditions, with cold winters and fervently hot and dry summers. The terrain is rugged and vegetation is sparse. The summer months bring droughts, intense humidity, dust, sandstorms and whirlwinds, whilst the winter periods feature freezing temperatures, surprise rainstorms, floods, and snow traps in the mountainous regions.¹⁰ These natural environmental and geographical characteristics ensure that Afghanistan is a desperately inhospitable climate for human existence, let alone combat operations.¹¹

There are a number of strategic implications to be drawn from this data. Firstly, the sheer size of Afghanistan and the lay of the land places increased strain on the logistics aspect of any

¹⁰ Peter R. Blood ed., *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001), <<http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/>> [accessed 5 February 2010].

¹¹ Other major military interventions involving the U.S. or NATO forces since 1990 include; Iraq 1991, Somalia 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1994, Haiti 1994, Rwanda 1994, Kosovo 1999, East Timor 1999 and Sierra Leone 2000. This list is far from exhaustive, however it reveals how Afghanistan was one of the largest countries (excluding Iraq) and undoubtedly the theatre with the most challenging physical geography.

military activity.¹² The mountains provide an obstinate physical barrier limiting access to only a few roads and passes, of which the great majority are untracked or have been decimated through years of conflict. Restricted choice of road access leaves convoys open to the risk of ambush or disruption which is reinforced by the high ground flanking the passes on either side. These overstretched logistics lines, running through a lethal environment, led the Duke of Wellington to claim “*a small army would be annihilated and a large one starved*”.¹³ Although modern technology has mitigated some of these challenges since Wellington’s day, the issue is still relevant with NATO itself acknowledging that logistics are severely “*hampered by rough terrain, unpaved roads and security threats*”.¹⁴ Even a military equipped the most advanced logistical capacity ever witnessed is significantly challenged by the contours of Afghanistan’s imposing terrain.

Secondly, the extreme climate and variable seasons have noteworthy implications on the conditions for operations. During winter the harsh temperatures have traditionally made combat operations impossible. In spring, as fighting comes out of hibernation, the balance of power is reset and tangible gains that were made during the preceding fighting season become null and void. The conditions for combat troops are far from comfortable. Vicious winds, soaring temperatures and uncomfortably dry conditions necessitate robust levels of technical and human endurance. This factor is further aggravated by the fact that the West’s conventional military hardware was originally designed to face the Soviet threat in the cool and temperate conditions of Eastern Europe, not the semiarid climate of Afghanistan.¹⁵ Facing these conditions, one of the main staff considerations for the current NATO force in Afghanistan is the ongoing need for frequent re-supplies of equipment, spare parts and provisions.¹⁶ In essence, the Afghan climate provide a formidable adversary to even the most technologically advanced militaries.

Thirdly, the geographical topography with its mountainous terrain is far from inviting to large scale military equipment, in particular armoured transport and heavy assault weaponry. This creates problems for armies reliant on such equipment for battlefield operations. A premise for strategists is that “*to decide to attack is to commit to movement*”.¹⁷ Yet conventional militaries have their mobility seriously impeded by Afghanistan’s geography. With an isolated and ambush-prone

¹² Afghanistan is the 41st largest country in the world and around the same size as the State of Texas. 'Afghanistan', CIA World Factbook, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>> [accessed 1 October 2010].

¹³ The Duke of Wellington comment in; John Sweeney, ‘The killing fields’ *New Statesman* (23 October 2008) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2008/10/afghanistan-british-taliban>> [accessed 12 September 2010].

¹⁴ NATO, 'Backgrounder: Logistics support for NATO operations: 7. Logistics for Afghanistan', *NATO On-Line Library*, (2006) < http://www.nato.int/docu/logistics/html_en/logistics07.html> [accessed 23 October 2010].

¹⁵ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), pp.298-299.

¹⁶ Lieutenant Michael C. T. Roberts, in discussion with author, 20 August 2010.

¹⁷ Patrick O’Sullivan, *Terrain and Tactics* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991), p.107.

environment, Afghanistan becomes entirely unsuitable to bovine moving and closely massed conventional equipment, reversing the initiative of attack in favour of highly mobile forces.

With precipitous contours that cover vast areas and a hostile and arduous climate, this preliminary geographical overview plainly reveals how the conditions in Afghanistan are totally unforgiving to large scale operations with conventionally and technically structured militaries. Conversely, in operational terms Afghanistan's geography is far more favourable to light and mobile forces who can exploit the mountain passes and valleys as though it were a playground for escape and evasion operations. Because of this, Afghanistan's geo-operational environment is a daunting theatre of operations, and one that even modern military technology has yet to equal.

The Human Geography of Afghanistan

Unfortunately for interventionists, the harsh and unforgiving landscape of Afghanistan is supplemented by an equally truculent and complex human geography. The presence of Islam transcends all aspects of life, thereby contributing to a highly traditional religious society.¹⁸ A crude population breakdown of Afghanistan will reveal a total of 55 different ethnic entities and tribes, speaking a total of 45 languages.¹⁹ The agglomeration of variable identities has manufactured bitter and lasting rivalries.²⁰ As a result, the relations among ethnic groups have traditionally been one of conflict and have played a major part in Afghanistan's troubled social history.²¹

Just as inter-group tribal fracas has characterised Afghan society throughout the ages, so it has also formed the basis of a hugely unstable political structure. Throughout the 20th century, every one of Afghanistan's political rulers has been forcibly deposed or murdered. The political fabric of the country is symbolised by an enduring contest for control between local entities, complicated by interference from regional actors in neighbouring countries, and in some cases, from major international powers.

While political systems and elites have come and gone, authoritarianism has never been far from the core of political activity. Despite this, effective political control of the Afghan peripheries has rarely been exercised by a centralised authority. Any influence of central

¹⁸ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2006), p.235.

¹⁹ 'Afghanistan', *CIA World Factbook*.

²⁰ Nigel J. R. Allan, 'Defining Place and People in Afghanistan', *Post Soviet Geography and Economics* 42:8 (2001), pp.552-556.

²¹ For a comprehensive history on Afghanistan see; Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co, 2005). For a history of Afghanistan that focuses on the military conflicts of the country see: Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2002).

government has been restricted to the urban minority, while the bulk of the population live in isolated rural areas, mostly free from the writ of central government.²²

The consequence of this is a highly localised and fractured society corroded by years of inter-group conflict. Political authority is to be found in the countryside, far away from Kabul. Local powerbrokers gain their authority through behaviour patterns that best resemble what observers would describe as 'warlordism'.²³ The inter-relations between warlords is characterised by a "*part feudal part democratic ethos*"²⁴ which abides by a strict code of honour that has no basis in formal written law. Rivalry and competition between the ethnic groups, warlords and tribes has been persistent since the creation of the state of Afghanistan in 1880 and this localised enmity remains to this day.²⁵

Combined with these tough social and political conditions - as well as the environmental challenges outlined in the preceding section - development in Afghanistan has effectively remained dormant. Only 12.3 percent of the land is considered arable and only 23,860 square kilometres of this territory is irrigated.²⁶ Industry is limited to the small scale manufacturing of basic handmade goods, whilst there is a very small production and extraction of natural resources. The country's principal export product is opium, which is internationally trafficked into the illegal narcotics industry. Reliable economic indicators before the intervention are hard to come by, however estimates suggest unemployment was as high as 40 percent and the per capita GDP was a meagre US\$130.80.²⁷

For basic necessities, Afghanistan relies on ongoing external support, of which a large amount comes in the form of aid. Yet, despite the exertions of aid agencies, Afghanistan remains an undeveloped and impoverished country with the majority of the population illiterate, and with one of the world's worst life expectancy rates at a startlingly low 43 years.²⁸ This is worsened by the wide dispersion of populations that make accessing communities difficult and implementing development strategies challenging.

²² For a comprehensive socio-political overview of Afghanistan see: Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War* (New Jersey: Princeton Books, 1995).

²³ The term 'warlordism' is hotly debated. In this study the term warlord is borrowed from Mackinlay and refers to "the leader of an armed band, possibly numbering up to several thousand fighters, who can hold territory locally and at the same time act financially and politically in the international system without interference from the state in which he is based", from John Mackinlay, 'Defining Warlords' in *Building Stability in Africa: Challenges for the new millennium*, (Institute for Security Studies, 2000), pp.48-62, (p.48).

²⁴ Major Andrew M. Roe, 'British Governance of the North-West Frontier (1919 to 1947): A Blueprint for Contemporary Afghanistan?' (Unpublished masters thesis, U.S Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), p.21.

²⁵ Allan, 'Defining Place and People in Afghanistan', p.552.

²⁶ George Kruys, 'Post-Cold War/11 September 2001 Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency with specific reference to Iraq and Afghanistan', *Institute for Strategic Studies*, (2005), p.53.

²⁷ 'Afghanistan', *UN Data*, <<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx>> [accessed 3 October 2010].

²⁸ Rex Brynen, 'Donor Assistance: Lessons from Palestine for Afghanistan', in *Postconflict Development: Meeting New Challenges*, ed. by Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren, (London: Lyne Reinner, 2005), pp.223-244, (p.224).

This brief sketch of Afghanistan's human geography has several strategic implications. The first and most obvious of these is related to the fractured and conflict prone social composition of the country. Even before adding another belligerent by means of external intervention, Afghanistan is categorically brimming with antagonists. The disputes between these groups are long standing and rooted in such complex sociological issues as ethnicity and tribal enmity. As a result, multifaceted conflict has become an omnipresent variable in Afghan society. Furthermore, as a consequence of enduring conflict, massive population displacement has regionalised many of these issues, ensuring that the grievances and consequences of the Afghan conflict are exported to a demographic beyond its borders.

Secondly, if the categorisation of a 'failing state' is ever justified, Afghanistan would be the primary candidate. The country's political structure meets the very definition of 'weak governance'. Society is entirely traditional and shows little evidence of ideological modernisation. Additionally, the dire socio-economic condition of the country and a consistent lack of progress caused by enduring conflict have allowed Afghanistan's infrastructural development to regress. This perpetual lack of progress has led some politicians to claim that Afghanistan is a "*broken 13th-century country*";²⁹ much to the outrage of Afghan officials. Yet research actually suggests that the comparison is unduly complementary to Afghanistan, with relative per capita incomes of England in the latter Middle Ages being significantly higher than those in modern day Afghanistan.³⁰

Thirdly, because the population, economy, and political structure are almost entirely locally determined and unofficial, in terms of intervention, it is difficult to identify the key power structures that are strategically essential to control. Furthermore, because of the diffused remoteness of population groups, security forces must be widely spread and isolated in order to provide a viable security presence. By definition, this requires a high volume of troops to cover the extensive terrain and maintain effective logistics lines. Alongside Afghanistan's imposing natural geography, this is an intimidating prospect.

Understanding these human geographical determinants is critical to any strategic assessment of Afghanistan. Such an investigation reveals a traditional, fractured, deprived and conflict-prone society. When combined with the natural geography of the country, these implications provide an exceptionally challenging geographical context to any intervention.

²⁹ Liam Fox, comment in 'Liam Fox: Afghanistan is a broken 13th-century country', *New Statesman* (24 May 2010) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2010/05/13th-century-fox-afghanistan>> [accessed 10 June 2010].

³⁰ 'Researchers: Medieval England Better Off Than Modern-Day Afghanistan', *National Public Radio* (7 December 2010) <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2010/12/07/131883758/researchers-medieval-england-better-off-than-modern-day-afghanistan>> [accessed 1 January 2011].

Thirty Years of War – The Political Context of Afghanistan

Despite the disincentives for intervention, Afghanistan has long been subject to external interference. It is the country's ill-fated location as the crossroads to the subcontinent, surrounded by a tense regional geo-political environment that places it within a strategic cauldron.

Pakistan's long-term interests in Afghanistan arise from a fear of geographical encirclement by India and the necessity for strategic defence in depth. Conversely for India, the prospect of an ally in Afghanistan affords the opportunity to apply pressure on Pakistan from a second front. For Russia, Afghanistan is the principal buttress against the threat of militant Islamic nationalism that continues to fester unpleasantly in Chechnya. Iran has established commercial interests in Afghanistan and with 1.7 million opiate addicts, has long suffered the misfortune of being the first stop on the narcotics trade routes.³¹ For each of these countries, Afghanistan serves both as a threat and as a point of strategic opportunity. For many years each of these regional actors has maintained an active and frequently intrusive interest in Afghanistan. These interests, ever adapting yet never lessening, show how failure to consider Afghanistan's wider regional perspective is failure to understand Afghanistan at all.

Alongside this, historically Afghanistan has found itself at the centre of wider international relations concerning superpowers and imperialists alike. In each case, Afghanistan has hosted some of history's most illustrious militaries and tested them to breaking point. While Alexander the Great managed to conquer Iran in only six months, it took him three years to suppress the area which is now Afghanistan. Louis Dupree writes that Afghanistan changed Alexander's campaigns definitively: "*From that time until he departed the Central Asia steppes, Alexander knew no peace...more wounds, more deserts, more thirst, more mountains, then Babylon, then death*".³² It was a cruel experience for Alexander's army. His soldiers battled the cold conditions and arduous terrain while being hounded by merciless Afghan resistance.

Over 2,000 years later in the long running dispute between Britain and Russia, famously termed 'The Great Game', the British Army was drawn into Afghanistan for fear that Russia might use the country as a springboard for attacks into India. However the Afghan population proved highly objectionable to the foreign invaders and set about the task of purging the country of the British. With roads that carved their way through mountainous bandit country, the British

³¹ Greg Bruno and Lionel Beehner, 'Iran and the Future of Afghanistan', *Council on Foreign Relations* (2009), <<http://www.cfr.org/publication/13578/>> [accessed 19 August 2010].

³² Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.280-282.

struggled to maintain their logistics lines while isolated garrisons suffered heavily under sustained attacks from local forces.³³ Unable to trust local proxies, the political efforts to implicate a strategy of 'divide and rule' proved ineffective.³⁴ An attempt to centralise authority by replacing the Afghan Emir with a British proxy only served to aggravate the population further.³⁵ Following a revolt in 1841, the British realised they were unable to maintain a foothold in Afghanistan and were forced to withdraw from Kabul. With a party of 16,500 soldiers and civilians, only one individual made it safely to Jalalabad while the remainder were put to the sword.³⁶ The Afghan warriors had demonstrated a remarkable capacity to outlast their opponent in warfare and as a result the British had been forced to sheepishly withdraw behind the Durand line.³⁷

Nowhere in Afghanistan's modern history has the anti-colonial resilience of the Afghan people been epitomised so plainly as with the Soviet intervention of 1979.³⁸ At the height of Cold War tensions, the invasion roused the U.S. into action. Local Afghan warriors, known as the Mujahidin,³⁹ were sponsored by Washington to embark on a 'jihad'⁴⁰ of attrition against the Soviet invaders. The Mujahidin adopted classic anti-colonial guerrilla tactics by orchestrating multiple small scale attacks which chipped away at Soviet morale. The well equipped Soviet troops had virtually no guerrilla training and subsequently experienced high casualties and failed to establish stability. The Soviet military, which comprised heavy armoured vehicles, were "against small highly mobile units [and] very little could be accomplished with the help of modern military technology".⁴¹ As Anatoly Chernyaev, aide to Mikhail Gorbachev, writing in 1987 despaired, "We suffered such heavy losses! And what for?"⁴² It proved a disastrous venture. By the time the Soviets eventually withdrew

³³ Field-Marshal Earl Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty-One Years in India* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1905), pp.349-377.

³⁴ Ibid, pp.429-439.

³⁵ Milton Bearden, 'Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires', *Foreign Affairs* 80:6 (2001), p.18.

³⁶ Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould, *Invisible History: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009), p.34.

³⁷ For a complete historical overview of conflict in Afghanistan see; Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: a military history from Alexander the Great to the war against the Taliban* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009).

³⁸ For a complete analysis of the intervention from both a tactical and strategic perspective see Edward B. Westerman, *The Limits of Soviet Airpower: The Bear Versus the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, 1979-1989*, (Thesis presented to the School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1997).

³⁹ The term 'Mujahidin' literally translates to 'strugglers'. The term became widely used as a reference to Muslim fighters who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

⁴⁰ The literal translation of 'Jihad' into English is 'struggle'. Jihad is frequently referenced in the Qur'an and although a wide range of opinions exist as to its exact meaning in this context it refers to 'religious war'.

⁴¹ Alexander Lyakhovsky, 'Appendix 8', *Tragedy and Valour of Afghan*, trans. by Svetlana Savranskaya (Moscow: Iskon, 1995) <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r21.doc>> [accessed 20 March 2010].

⁴² 'Anatoly Chernyaev's notes from Politburo Sessions', *Communist Party of the Soviet Union – Central Committee*, (23 and 26 February 1987) <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r19.pdf>> [accessed 20 March 2010].

in 1989, the campaign had been hugely costly with just around 15 thousand fatalities and at a financial cost of around 5 billion Rubles a year.⁴³

It was this repetitious history of failed foreign interventions that led British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to declare that the first rule of politics was “*never invade Afghanistan*”.⁴⁴ As a simple reading of history reveals, by nature of its strategic location, intervention in Afghanistan is never without a more complex regional dimension. Most importantly, the operational challenges facing intervention are so significant that no foreign power has occupied Afghanistan without immense hardship and eventual withdrawal.

⁴³ Lester W. Grau ed. and trans., *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat and Tactics in Afghanistan* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1996), p.xiv.

⁴⁴ D. R. Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), p.605.

Chapter 2

October 2001 – January 2003

‘Now the Taliban will pay a price’⁴⁵

The outrage that manifested itself after the events of September 11th necessitated the Bush administration to undertake definitive action which, in the first instance, would lead to the most recent intervention into Afghanistan. This Chapter analyses the first strategic phase of the intervention involving the counterattack into Afghanistan with the dual objectives of bringing al Qaeda to justice and overthrowing the Taliban regime which had harboured them.⁴⁶

Strategic Objectives - October 2001

In order to understand the strategic objectives of the U.S. on the eve of the intervention, it is essential to consider the cognitive implications of the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. consciousness. Even though some experts had long feared a large scale attack on American soil, few within the administration or the intelligence services predicted anything as cataclysmic and spectacular as passenger jets colliding into populated buildings.⁴⁷ The experience instilled in Americans a level of existential insecurity that has not existed since the Cold War. Yet in many senses the new threat was even more terrifying. Whereas the principle of mutually assured destruction had previously ensured a basic level of stability, non-state terrorists who craved martyrdom were hardly an enemy that could be deterred by the prospect of nuclear holocaust. Furthermore, as demonstrated by al Qaeda's dramatic exploits, the capacity for carnage on a massive scale and the relatively unsophisticated means by which terrorists could achieve this meant that the language of self defence, stipulated in Article 51 of the UN Charter, had been rendered almost meaningless.⁴⁸ Shaken by this ‘new’ threat, and with the determination to categorically avoid another 9/11, the response issued from the White House on October 7th 2001 was an unwavering “*campaign against terrorism*”.⁴⁹

What followed was a dramatic shift in foreign policy. The soft isolationist approach that the Bush administration had pledged during the 2000 election campaign was substituted for a strategy

⁴⁵ Bush, comment on “President Bush Launches Attack on Afghanistan”.

⁴⁶ For a concise history of the Taliban see; Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ Director of CIA Counter Terrorism Centre J. Cofer Black was quoted as saying, “*We are going to be struck soon...many Americans are going to die, and it could be in the U.S.*” Cofer Black quoted in Steven Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin Group, 2005), p.569.

⁴⁸ ‘Article 51’, *The United Nations Charter*, <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>> [accessed 10 March 2010].

⁴⁹ Bush, comment on “President Bush Launches Attack on Afghanistan”.

that was as proactive as it was uncompromising.⁵⁰ Under the assumption that ‘attack is the best form of defence’, the campaign against terrorism did not just involve tightening homeland security but necessitated campaigns overseas by “*bringing the war to the bad guys*”.⁵¹ First and foremost on the agenda were the al Qaeda terrorists who had made Afghanistan their home. Speaking from the White House treaty room, Bush authorised “*sustained, comprehensive and relentless operations to drive [al Qaeda] out and bring them to justice*”.⁵² By protecting the terrorists and continually failing to hand over bin Laden to the U.S., the Taliban regime had incriminated themselves by association. Punishment would not be a half-hearted affair; Bush made it clear that the objective in Afghanistan was ‘regime removal’ as the “*United States would punish not just the perpetrators of the attack, but also those who harboured them*”.⁵³ With the aim of overthrowing the Taliban regime and hunting out al Qaeda, the basic two strategic objectives for intervention in Afghanistan had been set.

Yet the premise behind the decision to topple the Taliban ‘regime’ demonstrated a fundamental component contained in the U.S. grand strategy in the wake of 9/11. The ‘War on Terror’ did not exclusively target terrorists but also any nation-state or regime which harboured terroristic activities:

*“Today we focus on Afghanistan, but the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers, themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril.”*⁵⁴

As this monolog suggests, there was clearly an assumption that terrorism was enabled through the support of regimes and governments. In this conflict Bush made it clear that there was no scope for impartiality and all countries had a decision to make: “*Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists*”.⁵⁵ This association with ‘rogue states’ would become the predominant strategic logic behind the ‘War on Terror’ but for the moment it lingered in the background while the focus was firmly on the impending intervention into Afghanistan.⁵⁶ With the objectives and strategy defined, Bush met with his war cabinet to create an operational strategy for Afghanistan to meet the first challenge in the ‘War on Terror’; it was termed ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’.

⁵⁰ ‘Bush/Gore Second Presidential Debate October 11’, *Federation of American Scientists* (11 October 2000) <<http://www.fas.org/news/usa/2000/usa-001011.htm>> [accessed 10 June 2010].

⁵¹ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p.281.

⁵² Bush, comment on “President Bush Launches Attack on Afghanistan”.

⁵³ ‘The 9/11 Commission Report’: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States’ (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p.330.

⁵⁴ Bush, comment on “President Bush Launches Attack on Afghanistan”.

⁵⁵ Bush, comment on “Transcript of President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress”, *CNN* (21 September 2001) <http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/us/gen.bush.transcript_1_joint-session-national-anthem-citizens?_s=PM:US> [accessed 10 June 2010].

Objective: Overthrow of the Taliban

The impact of the 9/11 attacks hit a nerve across the international community and subsequently the U.S. enjoyed widespread approval for the intervention.⁵⁷ In a context where genuine multilateralism can prove to be essential to an operation's legitimisation, the ease at which the U.S. gathered international support ensured that the intervention would not be tarnished by aspersions of illegality from the international community.

Regional support was strategically and operationally more significant but theoretically more challenging. The central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan opportunistically assessed the benefits of an alliance with the U.S and were unanimous in making a collective offer of logistical support, while the U.S snatched at the opportunity. Russia followed suit by providing the U.S. with information and expertise from the Soviet intervention.⁵⁸ Without any noticeable drama, the U.S. had established an alliance bordering the only territory in Afghanistan that was occupied by the opposition to the Taliban.

Yet Afghanistan's northern neighbours were thousands of miles from the Taliban stronghold. Even if the regime were dislodged from Kabul, the Taliban would still enjoy a considerable support base in its territorial heartland in the south of the country and across the border into Pakistan. Occupying Kabul was one thing, defeating the regime was quite another. To enable this, the U.S. would require an influence among the regime's principal support base - the Pashtuns. As it was Pakistan that had enabled the Taliban to conquer Afghanistan in the first place, an alliance with Islamabad was more strategically essential than any other.

Prior to 9/11, the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan had traditionally been one of discomfort and mistrust.⁵⁹ Yet after the Twin Towers fell, Pakistan was faced with an ultimatum - either ally with the United States or descend into isolation as an international rogue. In a tentative address to the nation, President Musharraf explained that the very survival of Pakistan necessitated an alliance with America.⁶⁰ After nurturing and protecting the Taliban for so many years, Pakistan gave the impression of a dramatic about face by rejecting their former protégée

⁵⁶ 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', *The White House* (2002), p.1.

⁵⁷ The intervention was authorised under resolution 1373 by "*Reaffirming the need to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts*". 'Security Council Resolution 1373', *United Nations Security Council* (2001), <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/557/43/PDF/N0155743.pdf?OpenElement>> [accessed 10 March 2010].

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.70.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.61.

⁶⁰ Pervez Musharraf, comment in "Text: Pakistan's President Musharraf", *The Washington Post* (19 September 2001) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/pakistantext_091901.html> [accessed 12 June 2010].

and decidedly standing alongside the U.S.⁶¹ It seemed incredulous to many, but at least in theory Pakistan had turned its back on its Islamist allies and joined the U.S. in the 'War on Terror'. With only Iran left on the sidelines, the U.S. appeared content that it had amassed the necessary regional allies to launch the intervention.⁶²

The Overthrow Strategy

Interestingly, it could hardly be said that the fierce rhetorical resolve, which rose like a phoenix from the ashes of 9/11, was manifested in the overthrow strategy. Despite the offers of multilateral assistance from NATO partners, the intervention strategy was to be executed mostly unilaterally and with minimal foreign troop presence. In fact, initially the hope had been that large scale foreign forces could be avoided completely.⁶³ Given the surprise of the 9/11 attacks, this reluctance was partly due to the absence of any "*off-the-shelf*"⁶⁴ contingency plan. Yet also strategists were determined to avoid any repeat of the Soviet intervention. The logic of this approach was grounded on the assumption that the presence of foreign troops would aggravate the Afghans, unsettle Pakistan and foster resentment in the wider Muslim world.⁶⁵

The strategy that developed sought to utilise Afghan military groups and tribes opposed to the Taliban to perform the overthrow while the U.S. presence and input would take the form of a 'light footprint', decisive but very much in the background.⁶⁶ By combining overwhelming force with highly mobile units, the sole objective of the strategy was to achieve a quick and definitive victory over the regime. What would happen after the Taliban had been toppled from power was deemed extraneous to the initial priorities.⁶⁷

The local proxies with the greatest credibility for contesting the Taliban were known as the 'Northern Alliance' (NA). Predominantly drawn from ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks, this military-political umbrella organisation represented a somewhat ragtag collection of rebel factions commanded by autonomous 'warlords'. For decades the Alliance had been plagued by infighting, united only by a disdain for the Taliban. Prior to the invasion the NA had been sponsored by the

⁶¹ When recounting the discussions between Pakistani President Musharraf and senior U.S. diplomatic staff, former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan Wendy Chamberlain recalls that "*Pakistan was very cooperative*"; comment in Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, pp.87-89.

⁶² As a surprise to many Americans, the Iranian government had viscusly denounced the 9/11 attacks while candlelight vigils were attended by thousands in Tehran. However Washington had no intention of taking the opportunity to renovate relations with Tehran and later demonised the Iranian regime as part of an 'axis of evil' accused of assisting terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction.

⁶³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.61.

⁶⁴ 'The 9/11 Commission Report', p.332.

⁶⁵ Michael O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', *Foreign Affairs*, 81:3 (2002), p.49.

⁶⁶ 'The 9/11 Commission Report', p.332.

⁶⁷ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, p.110.

U.S. and had established credibility and contacts with American intelligence agencies.⁶⁸ Indeed, immediately before 9/11 the NA had even started to gain “*military and political momentum against the Taliban*”.⁶⁹ In terms of allying with local forces, the NA was the only plausible candidate.

With very few assets and limited intelligence of Afghanistan prior to the invasion, it was inevitable, or perhaps unavoidable, that the U.S. strategy utilised local proxies for the overthrow. Even though the strategy might have been born out of necessity rather than choice, the decision to use local proxies had some logic to it. For starters, local forces had an extensive knowledge of the countryside as well as the operational experience of working in it. Additionally, they understood the socio-political context as well as having familiarity with the enemy. In the case of the NA, they had been actively engaged with Taliban forces for all but a decade. In a military environment as testing as Afghanistan, familiarity with the land and its people is a valuable asset. Furthermore, as historians are well aware, the people of Afghanistan have traditionally despised external intervention and consequently it is likely that local forces will be deemed a more legitimate with the locals than foreign troops. Lastly, from a crude cost benefit perspective, proxies were invariably cheaper in both financial and political costs than mobilising conventional forces.⁷⁰

In assisting the NA, the CIA provided equipment, intelligence and financial assistance. Meanwhile special forces were attached to local NA units to provide tactical expertise on the ground, while U.S. and western air power provided fire support from the skies. Together this assortment of intelligence officers, international special forces, air power and native Afghan warriors formed the beginnings of what became known as the ‘Coalition’ that would embark upon the overthrow of the Taliban.

The operational strategy that emerged for the overthrow of the regime was simple in its design and involved three components. First and foremost, any of the regime’s military infrastructures would be demolished by U.S. and NATO air power. Secondly, local NA fighters would engage Taliban positions with assistance from special forces and intelligence agents and supported by air power, heavy artillery and sophisticated long distance weaponry from naval ships located in the Indian ocean. Thirdly, huge financial inducements would be offered to entice tribesmen in Taliban occupied territories and strongholds to rise up and support the Coalition's efforts.⁷¹ With this operational strategy clarified in design, let us assess its implementation in practice.

⁶⁸ For a very basic overview of the Northern Alliance see 'Military Assistance to the Afghan Opposition', *Human Rights Watch*, (2001) <<http://www.hrw.org/background/asia/afghan-bck1005.htm#uf>> [accessed 15 April 2010].

⁶⁹ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, p.518.

⁷⁰ For a list of other examples of ‘warfare by proxy’ consider Vietnam 1957-75, the Tibet Uprising 1959-73, Congo Crisis 1960-65, Bay of Pigs invasion 1961, Angolan Civil War 1974-2002 and of course the Soviet War in Afghanistan 1979-1989.

⁷¹ ‘The 9/11 Commission Report’, pp.332-334.

The initial bombing campaign of Taliban infrastructure and static ground targets as a prelude to the ground offensive was predictable given the merit U.S. forces attributed to strategic bombing from past conflict such as the first Gulf War and Kosovo.⁷² The task was not enormous and the Coalition air forces had obliterated the short list of credible targets within the first two nights.⁷³ Given the paucity of targets and the extent to which the world's most advanced military obliterated the ramshackle defensive hardware of a vastly inferior adversary, commentators have understandably elected not to exhaust analysis on what was ultimately an inevitable outcome.⁷⁴

Of more significance were the events that followed. For phase two of the overthrow strategy Taliban positions were heavily bombed by Coalition air power while NA forces were let loose on the Taliban's damaged positions. On the face of it, the strategy appeared to pay off. In less than a week, the majority of northern, western and central Afghanistan had been captured by the NA while the remnants of Taliban fighters became caught in a "*shooting gallery*"⁷⁵ by NA forces or Coalition air power as they attempted to regroup. The remainder of Taliban forces simply melted away. Meanwhile in the south of the country, the extent to which "*money is the lubricant that makes things happen in Afghanistan*"⁷⁶ was being realised. Bribes and negotiations successfully galvanised Pashtun militias to rise up in the key southern and eastern areas of the country. Coordinated alongside NA advances and air attacks the pressure on the Taliban ground troops mounted and by the end of November 2001 the last Taliban strongholds of Kunduz and Kandahar eventually fell. On December 5th 2001, the Taliban surrendered, the regime had been successfully toppled and its remnants went underground or took to hills. On the face of it, the Taliban were no longer a recognised entity.⁷⁷

Estimates suggest that the Taliban at this stage had managed to accumulate roughly 60,000 troops and were frequently strengthened by reinforcements from Pakistan.⁷⁸ In layman's terms,

⁷² For an overview of the expansion of strategic bombing see; John Buckley, *Air Power in the Age of Total War* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁷³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.80.

⁷⁴ Robert A. Pape writes that "*the United States enjoyed air superiority over Afghanistan before even dropping a bomb*", in Robert A. Pape, 'The Wrong Battle Plan', *The Washington Post*, (19 October 2001) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A19459-2001Oct19¬Found=true>> [accessed 10 September 2010].

⁷⁵ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.82.

⁷⁶ Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), p.28.

⁷⁷ For a chronology of events see Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, pp.91-95.

⁷⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.80.

the Coalition ground troops were outnumbered roughly 4:1.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, only three months later, the regime had effectively collapsed and the remnants of the Taliban forces were surrendering in droves. The objective of overthrowing the regime was achieved with only a few NA casualties and one U.S fatality. By January 2002, the whole operation had cost only \$3.8 billion, a pittance compared to other contemporary military ventures.⁸⁰

The speed and efficiency with which the operation was achieved led observers to describe the effectiveness of the strategy as "*awe-inspiring*".⁸¹ Some commentators went even further, suggesting that this operational strategy "*will likely be remembered as one of the greater military successes of the twenty-first century*".⁸² Based purely on the immediate outcome, it could be argued that the operational strategy which led to the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan served its purpose and successfully met the strategic objectives with the additional benefit of minimal costs.

However some critics have hesitated over giving unconditional praise to the strategy, suggesting instead that the success of the overthrow campaign is better explained by the character of the enemy than by the effectiveness of the strategy.⁸³

The firstly argument is pioneered by Steven Biddle and suggests that the tactical incompetence of the Taliban front line troops is the determining factor behind the regime's dramatic collapse. Prior to the invasion, strategists appeared to have been concerned by reports suggesting the Taliban was a formidable foe.⁸⁴ However Biddle argues to the contrary, suggesting that the majority of the Taliban's front line troops were only part-time soldiers and highly unskilled.⁸⁵ The true extent of this was perhaps most aptly exposed when Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader, supposedly demanded that his troops stop "*behaving like chickens*".⁸⁶ Biddle supports this argument by suggesting that the rank and file of the Taliban were largely apathetic regarding ideology which, in the context of successive barrages from the Coalition, perpetuated a culture of low morale and disinterest.⁸⁷ Indeed, evidence suggests that a great number of Taliban chose to desert

⁷⁹ O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.49.

⁸⁰ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.97.

⁸¹ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.108.

⁸² O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.63.

⁸³ See; Stephen D. Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, 82:2 (2003) pp.31-46, O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', and, Milan Vego, 'What Can We Learn from Enduring Freedom', *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, (July 2002), pp.28-33.

⁸⁴ Paul Harris, "The Rout of the Taliban", *The Guardian*, (18 November 2001)

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2001/nov/18/terrorism.afghanistan>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

⁸⁵ Stephen D. Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq', *International Security*, 30:3 (2005/6), p.168.

⁸⁶ Mullah Omar, comment in O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.52.

⁸⁷ Stephen D. Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy' (November 2002) <<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub109.pdf>> [accessed 10 September 2010], p.12.

while others actively turned against their former comrades, truly revealing the extent to which the regime relied on amateur and unmotivated fighters.⁸⁸

By contrast, in areas where proficient Taliban fighters and al Qaeda resided, NA troops appear to have experienced greater difficulty and on a number of occasions were forced to withdraw.⁸⁹ However this group of hardliners is not representative of the majority of Taliban front-line troops during the overthrow stage. Instead, Coalition forces faced an unimpressive collection of amateurs which actually posed very little threat.⁹⁰

Secondly, it would appear that the Taliban's operational strategy was equally unimpressive. The military historian Sean Maloney, who was accompanying Coalition forces, points out that the Taliban were, by and large, structured as a conventional military, meaning the linear positions they adopted in the field were simple targets for air attacks.⁹¹ Closely bunched, lacking in overhead air or artillery cover and in poorly entrenched positions the Taliban were immensely vulnerable. Their positions could be seen by U.S. operators at great distances and posed simple targets for coordinated air attacks.⁹² As well as decimating troops on the ground, the Coalition's overwhelming airpower erased the notion of a 'front line' ensuring all Taliban occupied territory was exposed to attack. This crippled the support systems of the Taliban military. Without the capacity to re-supply, run communications, utilise heavy weaponry or even move around freely without fear of air attack, all the most basic tasks of a conventional military were rendered impossible.⁹³

O'Hanlon suggests that had the Taliban opted for a less conventional strategy, air power would have imposed a less notable impact while NA fighters would probably have been too few on the ground to defeat them.⁹⁴ Therefore in terms of military capacity, the poor quality of the Taliban forces and their imprudent choice of a conventional defensive strategy played entirely to the strength of the Coalition which made it inevitable that "*the outcomes were one sided*".⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Mike Collett-White, 'Afghan Taliban Deserters Offer Few Real Clues', *Reuters*, (18 October 2001) <<http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/2001/october/oct18i2001.html>> [accessed 10 September 2001].

⁸⁹ Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.171.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.168.

⁹¹ Sean M. Maloney, *Enduring the Freedom: A Rogue Historian in Afghanistan* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), p.39.

⁹² Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.168.

⁹³ Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., 'Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model', *International Security* 30:3 (2005/6), pp.138-139.

⁹⁴ O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.53.

⁹⁵ Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.172.

This strategic assessment of the first phase of the intervention reveals how strategic outcomes are not necessarily defined by specific components of the strategy. When considering the success of the Regime's overthrow, the capacity of the enemy must be taken into account. In this regard the effectiveness of toppling the regime is better explained by a force 'mismatch' than by the revolutionary strategic elements of the 'Afghan model'.⁹⁶ Instead of being motivated, professional and ideologically determined militants, the majority of the Taliban's front line troops were poorly trained part time fighters who were more inclined to scarper and defect than stand and fight. Furthermore the Taliban's conventional choice of strategy played to the advantage of the Coalition and their forces were easy prey to an overwhelming disparity of force which ensured the Taliban's dissipation as a perceptible military force. In essence, the U.S. *"possessed overwhelming power and faced a weak opponent"*.⁹⁷ The evaporation of the regime is better explained by these factors than any kind of strategic innovation.

This said, the strategy did nonetheless succeed as it efficiently *"removed [Taliban] forces from the field"*.⁹⁸ Approximately 20 percent of the Taliban's fighting force had been killed and a further 7,000 taken prisoner.⁹⁹ At this stage at least, the strategy had served its purpose. Strategists were pleasantly surprised with the outcome, as one Whitehall official notes: *"If you had asked me where we would all like to be by the middle of November I would have settled for this. So far, so good"*.¹⁰⁰ As far as the Coalition was concerned, the strategy for the overthrow had been an unprecedented triumph.

However although the Coalition had effectively toppled the regime, in doing so they had revealed their trump card and instead of analysing the true determinants of the triumphant overthrow, policy makers became blinded by their own success. Excessive self assurance began to impose itself on the decision making process while authentic strategic considerations suffered as a consequence.¹⁰¹ As the character of the conflict made a radical shift away from conventional warfare, the strategy remained perilously stagnant. This ensured that the accomplishments of the 'Afghan Model' in overthrowing the regime would have hugely detrimental effects to the longer term strategic objectives of the intervention.

⁹⁶ 'The Afghan Model' referred to the strategy outlined above of using local allies alongside US special operations forces and air power. See Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare'.

⁹⁷ Vego, 'What Can We Learn from Enduring Freedom', p.33.

⁹⁸ Andres, Wills and Griffith, 'Winning with Allies', p.133.

⁹⁹ O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.55.

¹⁰⁰ Whitehall official, comment in Harris, 'The Rout of the Taliban'.

¹⁰¹ For an insight into the effects of 'hubris' on political decision making see; David Owen, 'Hubris and Nemesis in Heads of Government', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* XCIX (2006), pp.548-541.

Objective: Hunt Out Al Qaeda

By December 2001, the remnants of the Taliban regime rallied alongside the more skilled al Qaeda and Taliban fighters and made their way east towards the border with Pakistan, to an area known as Tora Bora.¹⁰² As far as al Qaeda was concerned, the rugged mountainous terrain, littered with intricate caving systems and passages would provided excellent conditions for a determined stand.¹⁰³ The small band of Western special forces and their Afghan colleagues followed in pursuit. Figures are desperately unsubstantiated but vague estimations place the number of al Qaeda and Taliban in the area as numbering somewhere between 500-3000.¹⁰⁴ More significantly, it has become widely accepted that in their midst was the leadership of both al Qaeda and the Taliban.¹⁰⁵ Whether they were captured or killed, it mattered little, the objective was to round up al Qaeda and “see [the terrorists] brought to justice”.¹⁰⁶

In the wake of the battlefield ‘successes’ up to this point, the Bush administration remained devoted to the operational strategy used in the overthrow of the regime.¹⁰⁷ Following an intense bombing campaign, local forces would ‘sweep’ through the mountain passes capturing or killing the defenders. It was anticipated that the remaining enemy forces would inadvertently flee towards other local forces ‘blocking’ their escape routes.¹⁰⁸

Despite the inordinate amount of explosives that Coalition forces rained in on al Qaeda positions, a great number of the defenders weathered the bombardment. On the ground, progress was slow and local forces rarely defeated al Qaeda face to face, only taking territory when the defenders themselves chose to withdraw. Minimal casualties were caused by bombing and the ‘sweeping’ and ‘blocking’ forces made very few captures.¹⁰⁹ By the end of the operation, only three hundred bodies, another hundred or so freshly dug graves, and a few prisoners were

¹⁰² Stephen D. Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy', p.35.

¹⁰³ Evidence collected during this part of the operation included the al Qaeda manual entitled *The Black Book of Mountainous Operations and Training* suggesting that the mountainous border regions had been pre-selected by al Qaeda leadership as a final stand. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.95.

¹⁰⁴ 'Tora Bora Revisited: How We Failed to Get Bin Laden And Why It Matters Today', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009), p.14.

¹⁰⁵ A good discussion based on intercepted radio transmissions, interviews from Guantanamo Bay detainees and expert opinions from intelligence officers suggests the Osama bin Laden and other senior level al Qaeda and Taliban leaders were housed in the Tora Bora caves at this juncture. A more complete analysis is available in 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, pp.5-10.

¹⁰⁶ Bush, comment on "Bin Laden is wanted: dead or alive, says Bush", *The Telegraph Online*, (18 September 2001) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1340895/Bin-Laden-is-wanted-dead-or-alive-says-Bush.html>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

¹⁰⁷ Thom Shanker, "A Nation Challenged: Tactics; Rumsfeld Defends Strategy Used in Tora Bora Last Year", *New York Times* (18 April 2002) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/18/world/nation-challenged-tactics-rumsfeld-defends-strategy-used-tora-bora-last-year.html>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

¹⁰⁸ Peter John Paul Krause, 'The Last Good Chance: A Reassessment of U.S. Operations at Tora Bora', *Security Studies* 17:4 (2008), p.667.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.669.

found.¹¹⁰ In addition, none of these people, dead or alive, were identified as being senior members of the Taliban or al Qaeda. Although the final morsel of Taliban/al Qaeda territory had been captured, the nucleus of al Qaeda's rearguard was neither dead nor alive; they had simply vanished.

A Competent Enemy

As suggested in the previous section, the perceived effectiveness of local allies in the 'Afghan Model' was artificially exaggerated by a disproportionate impact of U.S. airpower and technical fallibilities on the part of the enemy. In the caves of Tora Bora, the context was very different from the battlefields where Taliban forces had been routed in the preceding months.

Firstly, the environment was ideal for a defensive position. Situated at 14,000 ft above sea level, the defenders had fortified commanding fire positions with caving systems that went deep into the mountainside. They were well stocked and had excellent knowledge of the geographical area.¹¹¹ In itself, the extreme terrain and virtual 'fortress style' defences meant that the tactical location provided the ultimate 'force multiplier' for the defending troops.¹¹²

Secondly, the enemy was far more skilful and tactically aware than the Taliban forces from preceding operations. This enemy was well trained, motivated and experienced.¹¹³ They had learnt from their past mistakes in the earlier stages of Operation Enduring Freedom and now concealed themselves better, adopting a strategy that better resembled irregular mountain guerrillas than conventional forces.¹¹⁴ In this sense "*standoff precision bombing became far less effective*"¹¹⁵ and the attackers could not rely on overwhelming force to scatter amateurish opposition as it had done before.

So even before local forces engaged with the al Qaeda and Taliban forces hidden in the mountainous border regions, the two points outlined above suggest that the balance of tactical advantage had shifted decisively to the defenders. Indeed their position was deemed so formidable that some commentators have suggested that "*even a highly motivated, well trained, and well equipped modern army would have had trouble*".¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ John Donnelly, 'How US Strategy in Tora Bora Failed', *Boston Globe* (10 February 2002) <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines02/0210-05.htm>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.4.

¹¹² Krause, 'The Last Good Chance', p.676.

¹¹³ Ibid, p.651.

¹¹⁴ Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare', p.35.

¹¹⁵ Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.169.

¹¹⁶ Andres, Wills and Griffith, 'Winning with Allies', p.145.

The evidence suggests that the local forces selected to embark on this perilous yet critical climactic mission were anything but 'highly motivated, well trained or well equipped'. Unable to use the NA forces due to the societal complications of having ethnic Tajik or Uzbek forces in Pashtun-dominated areas, U.S. operators were forced to enlist the assistance of minor local warlords with unscrupulous reputations together with a ramshackle collection of troops of less experience and of even poorer quality than their NA counterparts.¹¹⁷

The implications of this were significant. Attacks were persistently repelled while the local forces showed a recurring willingness to retire from the battlefield.¹¹⁸ Gary Berntsen, the principal CIA operator at Tora Bora claims that the incapacity of local forces meant frustratingly slow progress, thereby allowing significant bands of al Qaeda to evade capture and slip into Pakistan.¹¹⁹ To make matters worse the local warlords also functioned under their own agendas and "*at key junctures of the battle, the Americans learned they had little or no control*".¹²⁰ In one case, on the 12th December 2001, a miscellaneous al Qaeda group was cornered in the mountains by local General Zaman. Instead of pushing on with an assault, Zaman offered a truce. Commentators have suggested that this intermission enabled the escape of around 1,000 al Qaeda members.¹²¹ At other times, local allies were reluctant to fight or pursue targets, preferring to stake their claims in newly captured lands.¹²²

In order to keep their local agents focused, vast sums of money were used as inducements. Richard Clarke estimates that during this period an estimated \$70 million dollars were used as bribes - however the figure could be as high as \$100 million.¹²³ Infuriatingly for the U.S., it appears the practice of bribery was not a tactic exclusive to the coalition: in some instances al Qaeda appeared to have induced CIA funded militias to escort them into Pakistan. Indeed, Rashid estimates that around 600-800 al Qaeda escaped from Tora Bora with the help of entrepreneurial Pashtun guides.¹²⁴ This frustrating situation led CIA leader Gary Schroen to comment despairingly that "*you cannot buy an Afghan's loyalty, but you can rent it*".¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ Krause, 'The Last Good Chance', p.649.

¹¹⁸ 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, p.11.

¹¹⁹ Gary Berntsen, comment in Leigh Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), p.20.

¹²⁰ Donnelly, 'How US Strategy in Tora Bora Failed'.

¹²¹ Neville, *Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan*, pp.19-20.

¹²² Donnelly, 'How US Strategy in Tora Bora Failed'.

¹²³ Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (London: The Free Press, 2004).

¹²⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.98.

¹²⁵ Schroen, *First In*, p.359.

Ultimately this evidence queries the wisdom of using local Afghan forces in a complex and demanding tactical situation such as the one presented at Tora Bora. Unsurprisingly, these groups were not as interested in applying the same level of 'retributive justice' to al Qaeda as U.S. forces would have been. In fact the motivations of these local proxies were exceptionally dubious. It is most likely that the majority of local commanders saw their U.S. allies as interim bedfellows. Once their pay cheques had been cashed and the Taliban had been removed from their privately controlled territories, they no longer had any impetus for rounding up al Qaeda and the remnants of the regime. Andres et al identify how "*motivation is a critical factor in war*".¹²⁶ As far as local forces were concerned Tora Bora was a dangerous place occupied by ruthless defenders. Given that they had already toppled the regime, what did they have to gain from the pursuit of a few al Qaeda fugitives?

Instead the local forces used in Tora Bora proved to be unmotivated, unreliable and tactically inferior to the opposition that they faced. For this reason, observers have questioned why the strategy to use such forces was agreed at a critical stage when the stakes were so high and the ultimate objective of capturing the al Qaeda conspirators of 9/11 was in sight.¹²⁷ Despite the relative successes of local forces in the overthrow stage of the operation, relying on similar, if not perhaps even less capable forces, for the much more technical task of rounding up al Qaeda was a grossly unrealistic expectation.

While the local Pashtun militias made up the 'sweep' of the operation, it was predominantly 4,000 soldiers from Pakistan's frontier corps that provided the 'blocking' element along the border.¹²⁸ Theoretically, enlisting the support of Pakistan's security forces was absolutely essential as they possessed the best intelligence on the Taliban and al Qaeda as well as having large scale ground troops in the area available for deployment, and with experience of operations in the area.¹²⁹ Pakistan's assistance should have been critical not only in blocking off escape routes but also in identifying, locating and confronting enemy targets.

However, in practice, the Pakistani link actually proved to be more problematic than it was helpful. The critical factor here is that prior to 9/11 Pakistani security forces had been in cohorts with the Taliban. Even if a political u-turn had occurred in Islamabad it was perhaps naïve to expect Pakistani ISI officers working in Afghanistan to turn on their allies overnight.¹³⁰ Indeed the evidence suggests that many ISI officers continued to work alongside Taliban forces

¹²⁶ Andres, Wills and Griffith, 'Winning with Allies', p.148.

¹²⁷ 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*.

¹²⁸ Krause, 'The Last Good Chance', p.650.

¹²⁹ Schroen, *First In*, p.163.

¹³⁰ The ISI is the acronym used for Pakistan's secret service; the Inter-Services Intelligence.

throughout the intervention.¹³¹ Gary Schroen suggests that during this period the ISI operated on a very different agenda from the official line in Islamabad and frequently worked to frustrate U.S. ambitions and protect Taliban interests. With hindsight Schroen believes that the U.S. reliance on Pakistan was a “*disturbing and a real mistake*”.¹³² Rashid alludes to another interesting instance where Pakistan appears to have made a plea to the U.S. to allow planes in to pick up ISI operatives cornered in Kunduz, where they had actually been had been fighting alongside Taliban forces. The U.S. apparently allowed the airlift, and when Kunduz did finally surrender, Rashid suggests that there were thousands of al Qaeda and Taliban members missing. The event was later dubbed by a retired Pakistani Colonel as the ‘Great Escape’.¹³³

Consequently, with both the 'sweep' and the 'block' aspects of the strategy either unreliable or ineffective, the principal question among commentators is why the U.S. chose not to conduct these operations with U.S. or Western troops who possessed the skills and motivation to confront al Qaeda and the rearguard of the Taliban.

Western Ground Troops

To an extent, U.S. and Western forces were already engaged in counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan from the outset. The requirement for highly mobile, ruthlessly efficient forces trained specifically for harsh environments and covert operations meant that special forces were the ideal tactical utility.¹³⁴ In keeping with the doctrine of 'small footprint', clandestine special forces conducted a number of small-scale operations on suspected al Qaeda and Taliban locations in the border regions. Some commentators argue that the special forces contribution to this phase was a textbook performance.¹³⁵ When contact was made with Taliban or al Qaeda forces, it only ever had one outcome. Any locations that were deemed safe havens had their stockpiles stripped and the facility destroyed.

However in reality it would appear that a significant amount of al Qaeda escaped the wrath of “*America’s avenging angels*”.¹³⁶ This is not a slight on the operational efficiency of special forces but it appears there were simply too few of these units on the ground to even come close to covering

¹³¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.91.

¹³² Schroen, *First In*, p.164.

¹³³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.93.

¹³⁴ Barry R. Posen, 'The Struggle against Terrorism: Grand Strategy, Strategy, and Tactics', *International Security* 26:3 (2001/2), pp.48-49.

¹³⁵ Robin Moore, *Task Force Dagger: The Hunt for bin Laden: The inside story of special operations forces in the war on terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), p.348.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.343.

the complex web of compounds, caves and passages in the extensive border regions.¹³⁷ Several thousand square miles and only a few hundred special forces available was an equation that simply did not add up. The only plausible alternative was conventional ground troops.

However introducing ground troops to Afghanistan was no easy task, as it faced logistical as well as political challenges. U.S. strategists were concerned that helicopter insertions in the mountains were vulnerable to attacks from the surrounding ridges. The same danger applied to re-supplying and evacuation operations.¹³⁸ The altitude at which U.S. forces would be operating would be a first in U.S. military history. The mission was deemed to be unavoidably dangerous and casualties were widely considered to be inevitable.¹³⁹ With so many unknowns and potential risks, it is at least understandable that the US was reluctant to risk front line combat troops. Additionally, from a political perspective, strategists were certain that U.S. or foreign ground troop presence would cause outrage in Afghanistan and the wider Muslim world.¹⁴⁰ The last thing strategists would want to do was to exacerbate Islamic grievances. Taking into account both of these factors, the conundrum for strategists was epitomised in a comment made by Colonel Mark Rosengard, director of operations for Task Force Dagger, who described Afghanistan as “*the most strategically impossible place to introduce force on the entire...planet*”.¹⁴¹

Hindsight however suggests that Rosengard's claims of 'mission impossible' may be exaggerated. The political implications of temporarily deploying a few thousand U.S. troops appear somewhat irrelevant in the context of the 150,000 or so foreign troops that were based in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2011.¹⁴² Furthermore, the effort to keep casualty figures down could be deemed obsolete given that U.S. forces have now lost over 1,600 soldiers since the Tora Bora operation came to a close.¹⁴³ Of course these developments were unforeseen; nonetheless it does put this strategic decision into context with what was to follow.

Even when extra troops were deployed, the numbers were hardly significant. By December 2001 there were only 1,300 U.S. troops spread throughout Afghanistan. The majority of these were U.S. Marines stationed at Kandahar carrying out little more than support roles.¹⁴⁴ Richard A. Clarke aptly put this shortfall into perspective when he stated there were “*fewer U.S. troops for all of*

¹³⁷ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.124.

¹³⁸ ‘Tora Bora Revisited’, *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, pp.17-18.

¹³⁹ Krause, ‘The Last Good Chance’, p.676.

¹⁴⁰ William R. Hawkins, ‘What Not to Learn from Afghanistan’, *Parameters* (Summer 2002), p.27.

¹⁴¹ Colonel Mark Rosengard, comment in Andres, Wills and Griffith, ‘Winning with Allies’, p.131.

¹⁴² “Attacks kill 8 foreign troops in Afghanistan”, *Reuters* (14 October 2010) <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE69D10P20101014>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

¹⁴³ “Operation Enduring Freedom”, *icasualties.org* <<http://icasualties.org/oef/>> [accessed 1 July 2011].

¹⁴⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.99.

Afghanistan than the number of NYPD assigned to Manhattan".¹⁴⁵ This figure could scarcely even begin to cover the vast and difficult terrain of Afghanistan with its widely dispersed population.

Indeed some assessments on counterinsurgency activity in Afghanistan have proposed a 10:1 ratio in favour of the defenders in such operations.¹⁴⁶ As al Qaeda and the Taliban had essentially adopted guerrilla tactics by December 2001, and with some estimates suggesting there were more al Qaeda defenders than attackers, the extent to which the strategy neglected to meet this maxim for defence-offensive ratios is colossal.¹⁴⁷ Other commentators are more pragmatic, suggesting that with an additional 1,000 to 3,000 U.S. troops, the 100-150 possible escape routes at Tora Bora could have been covered, even if the figure was still uncomfortably meagre.¹⁴⁸

When U.S. ground troops were eventually deployed to frontline duties, many strategists felt that this deployment was too little too late.¹⁴⁹ It was also deemed especially frustrating given the proximity of Western troops at the time.¹⁵⁰ The logistics of deploying these forces may have been challenging, but U.S. and other NATO troops were in the area nonetheless. Rashid is adamant that the unwillingness to deploy U.S. troops is a key reason why so many al Qaeda and Taliban fighters managed to evade capture.¹⁵¹ Biddle supports this argument by implying that this type of operation required the best quality of soldiers and "*western conventional infantry were superior to all other combatants but their SOF [Special Forces] comrades*".¹⁵² Strategic decision making is always partial to the options available, however in this case mobilising Western troops was a workable alternative that might have maximised the opportunity for success in this critical objective.

When regular forces were eventually deployed in combat roles, it was not until March 2002 during the second major attempt to round up al Qaeda fighters in what was aptly termed Operation Anaconda. Operating in the Shahi-Kot Valley only 130 km from Tora Bora, the Coalition faced a similar threat and equally taxing environment.¹⁵³ After supposedly learning from their mistakes at Tora Bora, this time U.S. strategy sought to adopt a 'hammer and anvil' approach which incorporated both local troops and U.S. Marines. Local troops formed the 'hammer' and would drive the defenders towards U.S. Marines acting as the 'anvil'.

¹⁴⁵ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p.245.

¹⁴⁶ This ratio was established from the information and evidence provided by Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*.

¹⁴⁷ 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, p.14.

¹⁴⁸ O'Hanlon, 'A Flawed Masterpiece', p.58.

¹⁴⁹ Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p.275.

¹⁵⁰ Over a thousand soldiers from the Mountain Division were actively preparing for Tora Bora style operations in Uzbekistan, 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, p.17. In addition to this, strategists could have taken advantage of U.S. Marines based in Pakistan or even the U.S. Rangers in Oman and do not take into account the option of utilising NATO allies who had already expressed their enthusiasm to become involved Krause: 'The Last Good Chance', p.656.

¹⁵¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.91.

¹⁵² Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.165.

¹⁵³ Paul L. Hastert, 'Operation Annaconda: Perception Meets Reality in the Hills of Afghanistan', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28:1 (2005), pp.14-15.

But once again local forces were repelled. In theory the operation was meant to be completed within 24 hours; in reality it took 10 days.¹⁵⁴ Biddle argues that it was only with the assistance of Western infantry that local forces eventually managed to dislodge the defenders.¹⁵⁵ Even when al Qaeda and the Taliban were driven towards the anvil, they inverted the strategy on its head by pinning down U.S. troops from the high ground. The incident proved to be exceptionally challenging, and analysts have suggested the whole operation was *"a humbling experience for the Americans"*.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, as Kraus argues, the presence of U.S. forces did help *"turn the tide of battle from a potential debacle into an incomplete victory"*.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, the events of operation Anaconda demonstrated that inserting more foreign troops alongside local forces was an improvement on the previous model, but was not enough in itself to be the solution.

The decision not to deploy regular troops also had other consequences. With the Taliban 'regime' effectively removed by NA forces, there was an urgent need for some form of civil security. A complete absence of this anywhere outside of Kabul resulted in the menacing rise of tribalism as local militias, many of whom were funded by the U.S., were quick to take advantage of the security void. This 'third dimension' added another complication to security and proved undermining in the long term to both the authority of Kabul and the security of Coalition forces.¹⁵⁸ During the Taliban's tenure, its ability to purge Afghanistan of local militias was perhaps the sole benefit of the regime in the eyes of local Afghans. The re-emergence of the 'warlord' greatly unsettled the rural population and immediately established a grievance among local Afghans.¹⁵⁹

In a crude attempt to deal with opportunistic local militias, once again the U.S. used inducements to bribe local warlords in the hope that they would provide ground troops and act as sources of information for the Coalition. Yet Ignatieff observes that *"if you feed a snake, it may return to bite you"*.¹⁶⁰ As any reader of proxy warfare or Afghan history is only too aware, the risk in bribing and arming the local population has historically proven to be hugely problematic to security in the longer term.¹⁶¹ In this instance, it was precisely the case. Local forces proved too autonomous in their behaviour and far from reliable. Rashid argues that the tactic of buying off warlords *"only created further mayhem in the countryside"*.¹⁶² Good pay, lack of accountability and the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.11.

¹⁵⁵ Biddle, 'Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare', p.171.

¹⁵⁶ Hastert, 'Operation Annaconda', p.17.

¹⁵⁷ Krause, 'The Last Good Chance', p.647.

¹⁵⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.143.

¹⁵⁹ Barnett R. Rubin, 'Identifying Options and Entry Points for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Afghanistan', *Centre on International Cooperation* (March 2003), p.1.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire lite: Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003), p.97.

¹⁶¹ See Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

¹⁶² Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.131.

accumulation of substantial weapons stocks were dangerously destabilising, and the sponsorship by the U.S. meant that the process of militarisation in the countryside became a self-perpetuating issue. With each day that passed, any step towards disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) became increasingly difficult to execute.

Summary – Hunt Out al Qaeda

Critiques of this stage in the Afghanistan strategy vary significantly. For some scholars, the operations at Tora Bora and the surrounding areas, although failing to strike at the head of al Qaeda's leadership, did successfully eradicate the last Afghan sanctuary, severely damaging the organisation's capacity and putting al Qaeda on the run for life.¹⁶³ Other critiques have suggested the strategy was a categorical disaster in which "*the failure to finish the job altered the course of the conflict in Afghanistan and the future of international terrorism*".¹⁶⁴ Either way, there is overwhelming consensus that it was at this critical juncture that the U.S. came closest to its objective of seizing or killing Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants.

Trapped in a conventional mindset, the U.S. leadership may have been so in awe of the 'Afghan model' that hubris lead strategists to overestimate its value.¹⁶⁵ When the objectives shifted from the overthrow of the regime to rooting out the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban, the 'Afghan model' proved itself ineffective. Local forces were insufficient in both skill and motivation to confront determined and quality irregular forces. Furthermore it is highly likely many local elements, including the Pakistani security forces, were in collusion with the Taliban.¹⁶⁶ Where professional Western special forces were used, they were inadequate in number to cover the gruelling topography of the extensive Afghan landscape. Slow progress combined with ineffective airpower failed to overrun the stalwart defences of the Taliban and al Qaeda. This allowed the most ruthless and effective remnants of the regime and al Qaeda to quietly slip away into Pakistan.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the absence of large-scale forces left a security void which would soon be filled by entrepreneurial warlords laying the foundations for a decade of perpetual insecurity in the Afghan countryside.

For the majority of commentators, the key variable to address these issues was to deploy the best available U.S. or Western troops. Ultimately the challenge was both considerable and

¹⁶³ Paul R. Pillar, 'Counterterrorism after Al Qaeda', *The Washington Quarterly* 27:3 (2004), p.101.

¹⁶⁴ 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, p.1.

¹⁶⁵ Shanker, "A Nation Challenged".

¹⁶⁶ Matt Waldman, 'The Sun in the Sky: The relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan insurgents', *London School of Economics* (June 2010).

¹⁶⁷ Biddle, 'Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare', p.43.

dangerous. Adopting a strategy which had Western forces at its core involved both logistical and political risks. Nevertheless, in terms of applying the available 'means' to meet the desired objectives of eliminating the threat posed by al Qaeda and the Taliban, deploying Western conventional troops would have been the logical option. Failure to do so ensured that al Qaeda and the Taliban were never hit by the hammering blow promised by the intervention.

Conclusion – 'Now the Taliban will pay a price'

Although not a perfect outcome, by the summer of 2002, for many U.S. policy makers it seemed that the key objectives of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' had been achieved. The Taliban regime had been toppled and al Qaeda's training bases in Afghanistan had been severely disrupted. Although bin Laden and his senior lieutenants were still active, the sentiment among U.S. defence strategists was *"we will catch him, dead or alive...he cannot hide in the mountains forever"*.¹⁶⁸ As an additional benefit, Coalition casualties and financial costs had been minimal. Furthermore the intervention had been widely deemed as legitimate by the international community and the majority of Afghan people appeared to approve of the ejection of the Taliban.¹⁶⁹

Even though the regime had been toppled at a low cost and with spectacular efficiency, the strategy had failed in the crucial objective of hunting out what was left of al Qaeda. Furthermore many astute observers argued that the Taliban collapse had been *"more apparent than real"*.¹⁷⁰ Ultimately the enemy was undefeated and it would not be long until the Taliban orchestrated their riposte, while the illusion of success would rapidly fade away.

By toppling the regime so effectively, policy makers were lured into a false sense of achievement. Simply replicating the model at a time when the temperament of the conflict had already evolved was inadequate at meeting the more demanding objective of capturing and defeating al Qaeda. Instead strategists demonstrated an unwillingness to apply the available 'means' at their disposal thereby revealing a divergence between stated strategic objectives and what they were willing to implement.

Even if this had been rectified, it may not have guaranteed success in this crucial second objective. The capture of bin Laden at this early stage would by no means have guaranteed 'victory'. As Pillar correctly identifies, the 'War on Terror' was not a game of chess when all

¹⁶⁸ Source from the U.S. Department of Defence, comment in Harris, "The Rout of the Taliban".

¹⁶⁹ Rubin argues that *"Afghanistan enjoyed international legitimacy...and considerable support in Afghanistan, where Afghans saw [the intervention] less as destroying sovereignty than as potentially restoring it after years of interference by neighbouring countries"*; Barnett R. Rubin, 'Peace-Building and State-Building in Afghanistan: constructing sovereignty for whose security', *Third World Quarterly* 27:1 (2006), p.183.

¹⁷⁰ Pape "The Wrong Battle Plan".

comes to an end with the capture of the King.¹⁷¹ However historical analysis reveals "*that terrorist groups are invariably much stronger with their charismatic leaders than without them*".¹⁷² Hawkins supports this argument by proposing that when terrorists are "*beaten or in retreat, they cannot be allowed to survive and re-group*".¹⁷³ These authors argue that although the task was challenging, the one luxury the U.S. did have at this stage, which would increasingly disappear with time, was an opportunity to do just this. Employing all the available resources was essential to give the operation the greatest possible chance of meeting this objective.

Yet even if the intervention had been operationally flawless, the extent to which this style of military operation adequately combats the threat of Islamic terrorism is unconvincing. The enemy on September 11th was not Afghanistan, nor was it the regime that governed the country. The real threat knew no boundaries and operated from hotel rooms in cosmopolitan cities like London and Hamburg. Its business was conducted with the assistance of Western communications technology and funding from wealthy individuals with off-shore bank accounts. The enemy was more of an attitude of mind than a fully operational entity - an unconventional adversary in every sense.¹⁷⁴ Al Qaeda certainly had bases in Afghanistan, but its true strength was defined by its clandestine franchise, immersed among the populace in many different political and social environments.¹⁷⁵

The anger that manifested itself after 9/11 necessitated that the administration embark on a discernable riposte against al Qaeda. However a reaction for reaction's sake is not necessarily strategically logical. Shrouded in the cognitive realms of classical realism and traditional self defence, the U.S. hoped that an intervention into the country where the terrorists were protected would deliver the fatal counterpunch. Unfortunately the strategists missed the point. Even when it lost Afghanistan as a base, this did not affect al Qaeda's ability to launch terrorist attacks to the extent that strategists had hoped.¹⁷⁶ Al Qaeda's strength was not its geographical base but its suppleness and transient manoeuvrability. Expulsion from its headquarters may have temporarily damaged its conventional capacity but it also made it harder to locate and confront. As with so many other guerrilla groups of the past, al Qaeda were able to fade into the background, whether that be in the dense woodland of the FATA valley or in the adjacent street in any of the West's

¹⁷¹ Pillar, 'Counterterrorism after Al Qaeda', p.111.

¹⁷² 'Tora Bora Revisited', *Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, p.19.

¹⁷³ Hawkins, 'What Not to Learn from Afghanistan', p.32.

¹⁷⁴ Giles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.141.

¹⁷⁵ David Kilcullen, 'Countering Global Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28:4 (2005), p.609 and Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Bruce Hoffman, 'Does Our Counter-Terrorism Strategy Match the Threat', *RAND* (September 2005), p.2.

cosmopolitan cities. From the very outset, the intervention in Afghanistan would play a part in a counterterrorism strategy, but it was only ever going to be limited.¹⁷⁷

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¹⁷⁷ For some arguments on the issue of Afghanistan's role within the wider strategy of counterterrorism see; Paul R. Pillar, 'Counterterrorism after Al Qaeda', *The Washington Quarterly* 27:3 (2004), pp.101-113, Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, Kilcullen, 'Countering Global Insurgency', Scheuer, *Marching Toward Hell*, and Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*.

Chapter 3

January 2003 – October 2008

‘Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on’¹⁷⁸

With the fall of the Taliban, a wave of sanguinity engulfed the U.S. administration, leading Defence Secretary Rumsfeld in May 2003 to prematurely state that “*major combat activity*”¹⁷⁹ had ended in Afghanistan. With this pronouncement the administration now had license to concentrate on the next stage of the 'War on Terror'. By the spring of 2002, Iraq was in Washington's sights and on the 20th March 2003 the U.S. and a ‘Coalition of the willing’¹⁸⁰ officially began combat operations in Iraq.

Meanwhile the conflict in Afghanistan continued to seethe with volatility. U.S. policy makers, blissfully naïve of the long-term implications of failing to defeat their enemy, had brazenly shifted their attention elsewhere. The ‘light footprint’ approach in Afghanistan was about to get even lighter.

Strategic Objectives – January 2003

With the objectives of the intervention in Afghanistan assumed to be mostly accomplished, U.S. grand strategy from 2003 onwards elaborated and expanded on the strategic logic outlined in Chapter 2. What followed was widely recognised to be “*the most sweeping redesign of U.S. grand strategy since the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt*”.¹⁸¹ Similar to Roosevelt, the shift had been defined by national tragedy. America had now awoken to the fact that unprecedented devastation could be inflicted on the U.S. homeland by relatively unsophisticated means. Yet in identifying the chief security threat, strategists shifted policy focus away from asymmetric terrorism and towards the notion of ‘rogue states’. In a highly pugnacious State of the Union address, President Bush claimed “*the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons*”.¹⁸² Of these threats, Bush singled out three regimes which he termed the ‘axis of evil’, which included Iran, North Korea and Iraq. These three regimes replaced terrorist groups as the ultimate proprietors of terror - aggressive, unpredictable and capable of launching weapons of mass destruction.

¹⁷⁸ Bush, comment on “Bush State of the Union Address”.

¹⁷⁹ Donald Rumsfeld, comment in Najibullah Lafraie, ‘Resurgence of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan: How and Why?’, *International Politics* 46:1 (2009), p.102.

¹⁸⁰ The coalition of the willing is a term used to describe a group of states committed to military action without it being of the express mandate of the United Nations. Of the 49 countries that supported the invasion of Iraq, the principal actors who contributed ground troops were the U.S., United Kingdom, Australia, Poland and Denmark.

¹⁸¹ John Lewis Gaddis, ‘Grand Strategy in the Second Term’, *Foreign Affairs* 84:1 (2005), p.2.

In reality, the links these regimes had to international terrorism was speculative at best. Yet the strategic connection was simple. The prospects of similar surprise attacks meant that the U.S. was obliged to “*act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed*”.¹⁸³ As a result, a doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence became engrained into the U.S. grand strategy.¹⁸⁴

It was in this context that Iraq came to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. Accusations that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring terrorism, as well as having a history of aggression towards its own people, were amassed into an ambiguous rationale for intervention.¹⁸⁵ Regardless of which *raison d'être* took precedence, ultimately the public justification for intervention was that Iraq posed a direct and imminent threat to the U.S. and her allies. After ‘regime removal’, the strategic logic assumed a Liberal nation-building plan would allow Western norms of freedom and democracy to prevail. As these values matured, a *de facto* ‘mission civilisatrice’ would be achieved, and Iraq would cease to be a threat.¹⁸⁶

Unlike Afghanistan, there was to be no ‘light footprint’ in the overthrow of Saddam’s regime. The operational strategy was rooted in the doctrine of ‘overwhelming force’ to bring about a rapid and conclusive victory.¹⁸⁷ In successfully paralysing Iraqi resistance, victory was swift and brutal.¹⁸⁸ Regime removal in Iraq was achieved in little over a month, leading President Bush to publicly declare ‘mission accomplished’ on May 1st 2003.¹⁸⁹

It was not long before it became glaringly obvious that the broad strategy of the ‘War on Terror’ had overstretched itself. The security environment in both Iraq and Afghanistan quickly mutated into insurgencies, casualties began to mount and the nation-building process stumbled. It became clear that a methodical post-overthrow reconstruction strategy for both Iraq and Afghanistan was perilously absent.¹⁹⁰ The honeymoon period for successive rapid victories came to an abrupt end. Now the U.S. and her allies would have to deal with the consequences of an overly ambitious strategy.

¹⁸² Bush, comment on “Bush State of the Union Address”.

¹⁸³ ‘The National Security Strategy of the United States of America’, *The White House* (2002), p.iv.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Anticipatory’ or ‘pre-emptive’ self defence refers to cases where an actor uses armed force to confront an impending threat before the threat has the chance to materialise. See Naiz A. Shah, ‘Self-defence, Anticipatory Self-defence and Pre-emption: International Law’s Response to Terrorism’, *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 12:1 (2007), pp.95-126.

¹⁸⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads* (London: Profile Books, 2006), pp.78-79.

¹⁸⁶ Although several theories (including conspiracy speculation) exist as to the U.S. strategic logic behind the invasion of Iraq, this premise is widely acknowledged as the most compelling. U.S. Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, p.123.

¹⁸⁷ The military terminology of ‘Shock and Awe’ originated in Harlan Ullman and James Wade, *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (Washington DC: NDU Press, 1996).

¹⁸⁸ “The Fall of Baghdad”, *New York Times* (10 April 2003) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/10/opinion/the-fall-of-baghdad.html>> [accessed 12 September 2010].

¹⁸⁹ “Mission Accomplished” Speech by President Bush on USS Abraham Lincoln’, *About.com Middle East Issues* (1 May 2003) <<http://middleeast.about.com/od/usmiddleeastpolicy/a/me080921a.htm>> [accessed 12 September 2010].

With military capacity highly overstretched and Iraq considered the principal concern, Afghanistan as a priority was relegated to the second tier. Until this point some commentators felt that the intervention in Afghanistan “*has every chance of success on the condition that outside support is maintained militarily and economically*”.¹⁹¹ Whether these aspirations could have been met is now somewhat superfluous to the debate. Yet equipped with a historical knowledge of the troubled country of Afghanistan, it is reasonable to suggest that a lack of attention at this critical post overthrow stage is perhaps the most blatant provision for failure.

Despite warnings from the experts, strategists were both unwilling and unable to adapt the strategy. The U.S. made it clear that “*nation-building is not our key strategic goal*”.¹⁹² While responsibility was handed over to the international community, the strategic commitment to the ‘light footprint’ persevered into the much more complex task of ‘nation-building’.¹⁹³ In the absence of an alternative, the strategy for Afghanistan became based on the principle of local ‘ownership’.¹⁹⁴ The international security presence would remain minimal, relying instead on local forces. The political development of the country would be left in the hands of Afghans and the aid and development efforts would fall under the same criteria. In terms of resources, the nation-building programme in Afghanistan would be one of the most economical to date.¹⁹⁵ In reference to the nominal assets dedicated to rebuilding Afghanistan, this became famously termed the strategy of ‘nation-building lite’ by Michael Ignatieff among other leading scholars.¹⁹⁶ With the war in Iraq soaking up resources, the significance of the ‘lite’ soon began to be felt.

As one of the American founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, once stated, “*a little neglect may breed great mischief*”.¹⁹⁷ This observation was to be proven by subsequent events in Afghanistan. The small avenue of opportunity that had revealed itself following the fall of the Taliban was shattered as Afghanistan was pushed to the back of the shelf. The subsequent years saw the

¹⁹⁰ See James F. Dobbins, ‘Towards a More Professional Approach to Nation-building’, *International Peacekeeping*, 15:1 (2008).

¹⁹¹ Kruys, ‘Post-Cold War/11 September 2001 Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency with specific reference to Iraq and Afghanistan’, p.58.

¹⁹² Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp.101-2.

¹⁹³ To avoid the impression of an occupation, the U.S. insisted that the United Nations would take over the lead role in spearheading political development. Although the U.S. would continue to play an active role, the responsibility for the future of Afghanistan had, in theory at least, been designated to the international community. The United Nations mission was called the ‘United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan’ (UNAMA) and this mission is ongoing at the time of writing.

¹⁹⁴ For a discussion on the broad issue of ‘ownership’ in nation-building see Simon Chesterman, ‘Ownership in Theory and in Practice: Transfer of Authority in UN Statebuilding Operations’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1:1 (2007), pp.3-26.

¹⁹⁵ James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel M. Swanger, Anga R. Timilsina, *America’s role in Nation-Building. From Germany to Iraq*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2003), p.146.

¹⁹⁶ See introduction in Ignatieff, *Empire lite*, pp.1-25.

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanac* (1758), preface.

creation of a strategy that reflected this. The process can be broken down into three distinct areas of strategic interest - political development, security and aid and development.

Objective: Political Development

The overwhelming trend in post conflict nation-building programmes is to adhere strictly to a liberal political model.¹⁹⁸ Traditionally this involves three stages. The first is more commonly known as 'post conflict reconstruction' and - at the political level - this normally involves a short-term provision of stability through negotiations and the establishment of a preliminary authority to take over from the existing vacuum. The second stage involves the creation of sustainable institutions, thereby allowing for an element of local administrative autonomy. The final stage is interrelated with the second and involves the creation of a political body with both authority and legitimacy. Classically this is achieved through liberal constructs such as the rule of law, elections and representative government.¹⁹⁹

On the face of it, the Afghan peacebuilding strategy represented this classic model. First and foremost, the strategy worked towards creating an interim authority to be established in the short term. Then for stages two and three, UNAMA, with the assistance of the international community, worked alongside a new Afghan government to support the development of centralised institutions intended to create a democratic, representative and legitimate government that would serve Afghanistan in stage three of the process.²⁰⁰

Yet there was one exotic twist to the programme. With the unremitting concern that Afghanistan was incompatible with foreign presence, the wider strategy of 'light footprint' remained prevalent. Therefore a notion of Afghan 'ownership' materialised at the core of the political strategy. Although the agenda would still be set by outsiders, unlike past peacebuilding missions, the strategy required "*Afghans taking charge of their situation wherever possible*".²⁰¹ This was an ambitious approach to nation-building, particularly given Afghanistan's political history. Nevertheless it was hoped that the political foundations would be laid to ensure that never again

¹⁹⁸ See Roland Paris, 'International Peacebuilding and the Mission Civilisatrice', *Review of International Studies* 28:4 (2002), pp.637-656, and Constanze Schellhaas and Annette Seegers, 'Peacebuilding: Imperialism's New Disguise?', *African Security Review* 18:2 (2009), pp.1-15.

¹⁹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2004), pp.135-6.

²⁰⁰ "Government – Afghan Bonn Agreement", *Afghanistan Government Website* <<http://www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>> [accessed 23 May 2010], and 'Security Council Resolution 1386', *United Nations Security Council* (2001), <<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/708/55/PDF/N0170855.pdf?OpenElement>> [accessed 10 March 2010].

²⁰¹ Simon Chesterman, 'Walking Softly in Afghanistan: The Future of UN State-Building', *Survival* 44:3 (2002), p.38.

would the anarchy of Afghanistan lead to the country becoming a sanctuary for Islamic fundamentalism.²⁰²

The Bonn Agreement

On the surface, the political peacebuilding phase in Afghanistan got off to an impressive start. At the international negotiations for the interim authority, conducted at Bonn in December 2001, many of Afghanistan's most prominent political figures came together and, after some intense negotiations, agreed upon a set of criteria to pave the way for the establishment of an official government.²⁰³ Given that these discussions took place in the context of intense rivalries following decades of civil war, commentators have understandably credited the Bonn process as a remarkable feat.²⁰⁴ Gaining any form of consensus among such volatile and hostile parties was a noteworthy achievement.

Nevertheless, the established criticism of the Bonn process is that it excluded a key participant - the Taliban. In this sense, Bonn was a 'victors only' guest list and with the Taliban absent yet still capable of resurgence, the process did not serve the conflict resolution purpose that it should have. This failing was recognised by the pioneer of the negotiation process, Lakhdar Brahimi, who himself acknowledged "*the Taliban should have been at Bonn. This was our original sin*".²⁰⁵ Although it is debatable whether the Taliban would have engaged the process, established conflict resolution wisdom suggests that without at least an invitation to a major participant the process was cursed from the outset.²⁰⁶

By the end of December the Bonn agreement had been signed and ratified by the UN.²⁰⁷ At least on paper, consensus and cooperation had been achieved. Yet so much of the Bonn mediation had been a tactical process to arrive at an immediate resolution.²⁰⁸ Something far more substantial would be required to guarantee a lasting political peace. Now the objective became the more complex task of creating credible institutions and establishing genuine authority as required by phases two and three of the peacebuilding strategy. As the devil's own luck would have it, this coincided with a degenerating security environment. Insurgency in the countryside increased

²⁰² Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.128.

²⁰³ Full text of the agreement available at: "Government – Afghan Bonn Agreement", *Afghanistan Government Website*.

²⁰⁴ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.136-8.

²⁰⁵ Lakhdar Brahimi, comment in Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.104.

²⁰⁶ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.104.

²⁰⁷ 'Security Council Resolution 1383', *United Nations Security Council* (2001) <<http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3154312.07418442.html>> [accessed 10 March 2010].

²⁰⁸ Harriet Martin, *Kings of Peace, Pawns of War* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp.15-27.

while political rivalries at the centre intensified.²⁰⁹ It soon became clear that the political strategy had the necessary tactics to thrash out a government but not the strategic vision to manufacture a credible political entity.

A New Constitution

The new Afghan constitution, which was established on the 3rd November 2003, proved to be one of the most modern and democratic to be proposed in a post conflict environment to date. The constitution envisaged a strong centralised presidential system, guided by overarching democratic principles.²¹⁰ This was plainly at odds with the socio-political context of Afghanistan, a country that is highly undeveloped and has consistently rejected progressive modernisation and centralisation. The liberal promises of the new constitution had little contact with reality and only served to undermine the fragile political situation by creating irrelevant and implausible goals destined for failure and disillusionment.

Carol Riphenburg provides a comprehensive analysis on specific aspects of the constitution which are flawed. Riphenburg argues that there is a fundamental inconsistency between Islamic states and constitutional democracy, a lively debate that continues to engage academics.²¹¹ Even if the democratic values can be upheld in the immediate term, empirical studies reveal that the long-term prospects for democratisation are questionable. A study by Enterline and Greig reveals that 39 percent of weak democracies fail by their tenth anniversary.²¹² The same authors also demonstrate how internal domestic factors such as diversity and pervasive poverty can obstruct democratic potential. As a diverse and impoverished country, the outlook for Afghanistan is dismal.²¹³ After 40 years, only one of the poorest imposed democratic states remains. Put simply, a democratisation success in Afghanistan goes against all the odds.

A more systematic concern with the constitution was its centralised design. Ultimately political power in Afghanistan does not rest at the state centre. Efforts to centralise authority have rarely been met with success throughout Afghanistan's troubled history. In the few cases where the centralised Afghan state has partially functioned, this has only been achieved through ruthless means that are entirely undemocratic. As long ago as 1880, Lord Roberts lamented that

²⁰⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp.197-199.

²¹⁰ 'The Constitution of Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Online* <http://www.afghanweb.com/politics/current_constitution.html> [accessed 10 March 2010].

²¹¹ Carol Riphenburg, 'Afghanistan's Constitution: Success or Sham?', *Middle East Policy* 12:1 (2005), pp.31-43, and Charles K. Rowley and Nathanael Smith, 'Islam's democracy paradox: Muslims claim to like democracy, so why do they have so little?', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25:4 (2008), pp.155-157.

²¹² Enterline and Greig, 'Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan', p.329.

“Afghanistan should be disintegrated, and that we should not again attempt to place the whole country under any one sovereign”.²¹⁴ Rippenburg writes that the entirely state centric character of the constitution is *“more a fiction of the international community than a reality”*.²¹⁵ Ignoring the experience of past occupations, the political strategy could not conceive of a design outside the realms of the state-centric model, even though the political design *“matches neither the real internal distribution of power in Afghanistan nor local notions of legitimacy”*.²¹⁶

Nowhere is this better exposed than with the preference for the Afghan Presidential System. In order to meet standards for strong centralised government, the strategy preferred a system that revolved around a single President.²¹⁷ Yet Rippenburg cites empirical evidence suggesting that Presidential systems produce fragile democratic systems in weak states.²¹⁸ Other commentators have observed that there are too few checks and balances in the Presidential system while it excludes locally influential individuals from the political workings.²¹⁹ For this reason some commentators have criticised policy makers for adopting a governmental model that was neither accountable nor capable of maintaining national consensus in a highly fragmented political environment.²²⁰ Therefore despite the landmark of the constitution, unless a strategy existed for making this political process function in practice, the constitution would largely prove to be a meaningless construct compared to the political realities of Afghanistan.

Elections

If the constitution had delighted peacebuilding advocates, the elections of 18th September 2005 had them positively delirious. An astonishing 7 million Afghans went to the polls and of this demographic almost half were female voters. The day was remarkably peaceful and there was not even one attack on a polling station.

Nonetheless the elections were not without their critics. Bülent Aras and Şule Toktaş state that high levels of coercion, illiteracy and disorganisation ultimately played a major part in undermining the validity of the process as well as damaging the image of the new National

²¹³ Ibid, p.338.

²¹⁴ Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, p.458.

²¹⁵ Rippenburg, ‘Afghanistan’s Constitution: Success or Sham?’, p.37.

²¹⁶ Stephen Biddle, Christia Fotini and J. Alexander Thier, ‘Defining Success in Afghanistan’, *Foreign Affairs* 89:4 (2010).

²¹⁷ Daniel Markey, ‘Failing Afghanistan: Barack Obama’s strategy won’t succeed unless he realizes that Hamid Karzai is neither the problem nor the solution’, *AfPak Channel, Foreign Policy* (2 December 2010) <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/03/failing_afghanistan?page=0,2> [accessed 15 December 2010].

²¹⁸ Rippenburg, ‘Afghanistan’s Constitution: Success or Sham?’, pp.34-35.

²¹⁹ Biddle, Fotini and Thier, ‘Defining Success in Afghanistan’.

Assembly in the eyes of ordinary Afghans.²²¹ Inevitably with post conflict environments, the process was littered with irregularities involving bribery, intimidation, multiple voting, and the stuffing of ballot boxes.²²² The Joint Electoral Management Board (JEMB) was forced to exclude 672 polling stations and 74 ballot boxes from the official count.²²³ Observers argue that this was only a fraction of the actual discrepancies that perforated the election.²²⁴ Essentially no matter how much the international community wanted to proclaim the election a success, it was largely an exercise in building legitimacy. Therefore it was the perceptions of the local Afghans that mattered and field research suggests that the irregularities were enough to engender disappointment in the eyes of the Afghan people.²²⁵

The issue at stake is not whether the elections failed, but what purpose they achieved. The saying goes that ‘democracies make elections; elections do not make democracies’. Elections in themselves were simply a process; by no means did they guarantee a credible political entity at the end of it. Both the constitution and the elections gave the impression of political development but ultimately they were always going to be an excellent public relations exercise, though not enough in themselves to induce genuine political development. As President Karzai himself pointed out: “*Is it enough to have a constitution? Certainly not! . . . A constitution can be no more than a stack of papers*”.²²⁶ Unfortunately for the nation-building strategy the political structure that emerged from elections and the constitution was not one that was able to implement a nation-building programme based on legitimacy and institutional capacity.

Political Capital and Capacity

As any student of nation-building is well aware, even with successful introduction of a new constitution and elections, the success rates of nation-building projects is imperfect at the best of times.²²⁷ Throughout the period 2002-2008, Afghanistan was no exception. In reality, the flagship

²²⁰ Markey, ‘Failing Afghanistan: Barack Obama's strategy won't succeed unless he realizes that Hamid Karzai is neither the problem nor the solution’.

²²¹ Bülent Aras and Şule Toktaş, ‘Afghanistan’s Security: Political Process, State-Building and Narcotics’, *Middle East Policy Council*, 15:2 (2008), p.45.

²²² Andrew Wilder, ‘A House Divided: Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections’, *Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit* (December 2005) <<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/areu-afg-16dec.pdf>> [accessed 11 August 2010], p.36.

²²³ ‘Final Report: National Assembly and Provincial Council Elections 2005’, *Joint Electoral Management Body* (2005) <<http://www.iec.org.af/jemb.org/pdf/JEMBSpercent20MGTPpercent20Finalpercent20Reportpercent202005-12-12.pdf>> [accessed 11 August 2010], p.6.

²²⁴ Wilder, ‘A House Divided: Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections’, p.35.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, p.36.

²²⁶ Hamid Karzai, comment in Riphenburg, ‘Afghanistan’s Constitution: Success or Sham?’, p.31.

²²⁷ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.135 and Oisín Tansey, ‘The Concept and Practice of Democratic Regime-Building’, *International Peacekeeping* 14:5 (2007), pp.633-646.

success stories of the Bonn agreement, the constitution and the elections concealed the fact that the actual political situation was desperately unstable and plainly revealed that the notion of a new democratic Afghanistan was just a façade. As one senior UN official observed: “*We are supporting the creation of the appearance of authority in the hope that it leads to the creation of actual authority*”.²²⁸ In achieving this objective, two strategic obstacles stood in the way.

The first of these was the political elite that inherited the new Afghan state. Instead of laying the foundations for democratic reform, the emphasis on Afghan ownership of the process meant that the political characteristics of the new government continued to reflect tribal feudalism instead of centralised progressive democracy. Expecting that former belligerents would leave behind their incarnations as warlords was highly unrealistic in Afghanistan’s socio-political context.²²⁹ Subsequently the calibre of the political leadership that emerged was highly dubious. Of the elected assembly, 40 members had ties to militias, 17 were active drug smugglers and a further 19 had at some stage been accused of committing war crimes.²³⁰ Corruption was endemic. Practically every position of authority could be haggled for some kind of favour. In 2007 Afghanistan was rated in the top-ten most corrupt countries globally.²³¹ Despite determined rhetoric from Karzai stating the desire to build “*a strong, rich, self-sufficient, powerful and lawful Afghanistan*”²³², in reality bad governance and corruption stifled any chances of Karzai achieving this ambition. The Afghan government demonstrated neither the capacity nor the resolve to address corruption issues.²³³ As a result the people of Afghanistan became increasingly disillusioned.²³⁴

Paradoxically, even though the strategy had clearly stipulated ‘Afghan ownership’ of the political process, this provision was not necessarily shared among the perceptions of the Afghan population. As Afghanistan’s political dynamics demonstrated an incompatibility with effective governance, local opinions of the U.S. and other international partners suffered as a result. It was not long before the traditional anti-colonialist narrative began to prevail over the optimism that had temporarily revealed itself after the overthrow of the Taliban. President Karzai was no longer

²²⁸ UN Official, comment in Chesterman, ‘Walking Softly in Afghanistan’, p.41.

²²⁹ Martin, *Kings of Peace, Pawns of War*, p.20.

²³⁰ Aras and Toktaş, ‘Afghanistan’s Security: Political Process, State-Building and Narcotics’, p.44.

²³¹ ‘Corruption Perceptions Index 2007’, *Transparency International* (2007) <http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007> [accessed 15 March 2010].

²³² Hamid Karzai, comment on “President Karzai Speech at the Event Marking the International Anti-Corruption Day”, *Embassy of Afghanistan in Canada* (18 December 2008) <<http://www.afghanemb-canada.net/public-affairs-afghanistan-embassy-canada-ottawa/speeches-afghanistan-embassy-canada-ottawa/content-folder/2008/december/december18.html>> [accessed 11 August 2010].

²³³ James Traub, ‘The Karzai Dilemma’, *The AfPak Channel, Foreign Policy* (13 April 2010)

<http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/13/the_karzai_dilemma> [accessed 18 December 2010].

²³⁴ For a general impression of Afghan perceptions towards their government see ‘A Survey of the Afghan People’, *The Asia Foundation* (2006), pp.9-14.

the triumphant saviour of Afghanistan but a 'puppet' of his Western guarantors.²³⁵ The foreign presence in Afghanistan was no longer a relief, it was an occupation. The persistent nationalism and opposition to 'foreign rule' that has defined Afghanistan's political history steadily resurfaced.

The second issue was the lack of attention given to capacity/institution building. For the highly ambitious centralised model to work, an intricate, sophisticated and overreaching administrative structure was essential.²³⁶ However, with attention diverted to Iraq, and given the "relative stinginess"²³⁷ of donor funding, the strategy appeared to ignore the requirement for genuine capacity building in favour of short-term, high visibility political success stories.

The consequence was relative anarchy, with Kabul's authority existing in name only and local warlord power rising to levels at which they became completely unmanageable by the centre.²³⁸ The government's authority and legitimacy increasingly lost credibility. For nation-building analysts like Ignatieff, failing to appreciate the importance of capacity building is a criminal error. Ignatieff argues that capacity building is an essential precondition for any structure to succeed and should trump even democratic ideals.²³⁹ As is recognised by Ignatieff, without the basic administrative preconditions of justice and law and order, other democratic processes are trivial.²⁴⁰ So long as these conditions remained absent, the nation-building project could not even administer, let alone progress.

With the Afghan government failing to provide basic services, and its legitimacy severely undermined, the Taliban were granted an avenue of opportunity. With Kabul's authority absent in large parts of the countryside, the Taliban capitalised by establishing shadow authorities. This issue prevails to this day and in a number of areas the Taliban have been more efficient than the government at collecting taxes.²⁴¹ With the absence of any effective judicial system, Daniel Markey writes that in many areas the local population willingly approach the Taliban to adjudicate civil disputes.²⁴² For decades the Afghan people have yearned for services and governance. Although the Taliban's methods may be extreme, if the alternative is corruption and anarchy then perhaps they are seen as the lesser of two evils?

²³⁵ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp.361-362.

²³⁶ William Maley, 'Democratic Governance and Post Conflict Transitions', *Chicago Journal of International Law* 6:2 (2006), pp.683-701.

²³⁷ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.137.

²³⁸ Rubin discusses the attempts at 'warlord democratization' and how the failure to extend centralised Afghan authority allowed warlords to maintain their militias and establish alternative forms of authority. See Rubin, 'Peace-Building and State-Building in Afghanistan', p.180.

²³⁹ Ignatieff, *Empire lite*, p.99.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.101.

²⁴¹ Jon Lunn and Ben Smith, 'The 'AfPak Policy' and the Pashtuns', *House of Commons Research Paper* 10/45 (22 June 2010), p.20.

As the euphoria surrounding the Bonn agreement, elections and constitution wore thin, it soon became very apparent that the political element of Afghanistan's nation-building programme was dangerously artificial. The 'light footprint' approach, which placed a heavy emphasis on Afghan ownership, played to the strengths of the country's shady political elite, thereby allowing them to manipulate the situation to their own personal benefit and undermine the long-term objective of representative, democratic and legitimate government. Furthermore the strategy did not place nearly enough emphasis on capacity development. Without capacity, authority was non-existent. Without authority, the door was left open to insurgency, crime and other destabilising threats.

Regardless of the political strategy that materialised, historically speaking, imposing an effective political entity in Afghanistan was always going to be a swim against the prevailing tide. The factitious and disorderly characteristics of Afghanistan's political structure suggested to Enterline and Greig that it was "*unstable, difficult and above all dangerous*"²⁴³ to pursue a democratic Weberian agenda in Afghanistan. In reality it was yet another example of nation-builders embarking on the grand design of the liberal peacebuilding model with a disregard for the local situation and little consideration as to how this would be achieved in practice. Strategists have readily acknowledged that in political nation-building "*the people want an administration that they understand and relate to*".²⁴⁴ In the case of the political strategy employed in Afghanistan, not only was it a foreign creation but it was also decadent and crucially failed to meet key stipulations for successful nation-building. As with many peacebuilding missions that had preceded Afghanistan, once again the idyllic vision of a post conflict liberal democracy had predictably fallen by the wayside.

Objective: Consolidating Security

As has already been suggested in Part 1 of this dissertation, although the Taliban had been overthrown, the security situation towards the end of 2002 was far from stable. Nevertheless, for both strategic and practical reasons, the security strategy remained committed to the 'light footprint' approach. The theory behind this strategy was rooted in the assumption that anything more substantial would lead to a military quandary similar to the ones experienced by the British

²⁴² Markey, 'Failing Afghanistan: Barack Obama's strategy won't succeed unless he realizes that Hamid Karzai is neither the problem nor the solution'.

²⁴³ Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, 'Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4:4 (2008), p.343.

²⁴⁴ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p.280.

and the Soviets.²⁴⁵ The practical reason for the 'light footprint' strategy was due to the ongoing war in Iraq. Regardless of Afghanistan's security requirements, its relegation to a second tier priority meant that there was little feasible alternative other than to establish a security model based on limited foreign resources.²⁴⁶

As a consequence of these two factors, the security strategy that emerged was a progeny of the one that had preceded it. Foreign troops increased marginally and involved two types of security forces. The first were responsible for traditional peacekeeping duties and fell under the banner of NATO, making up the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The second was made up of predominantly U.S. forces who continued in their counterterrorism operations. Both were complemented by aerial support. Meanwhile the vast majority of the security presence on the ground was provided by local troops who, with time, would be incorporated into the Afghan national security forces - the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). For those local agents and militias that were not incorporated into national security forces, the strategy remained as before and continued to pay off these entities in return for loyalty.

Warlords and Militias

Scholars of 'nation-building' will notice a critical inconsistency in this strategy immediately. Past experience recommends that a first security priority in a 'post conflict' environment is to initiate a process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR).²⁴⁷ The dangers of heavily armed lingering militias is identified by UN advisor Barnett Rubin who stated, "*Unless [militia groups] are either transformed into, or replaced by, legally constituted security services, neither reconstruction nor improvement of governance, to say nothing of the more distant goal of democratization, can take place*".²⁴⁸ The process of DDR would also gain the support of the local population who had suffered miserably under the militias in the past. Without a doubt, disarmament of the warlords was the most popular policy of the Taliban and one which the Afghan people were desperate to see repeated by the Coalition.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Feith, *War and Decision*, p.123.

²⁴⁶ Including linguists, intelligence operatives, counterterrorism specialists, special forces, spy planes among other key assets. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.127.

²⁴⁷ 'Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the report of the Panel on United Nations peace operations', *United Nations Security Council* (2000)

<http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/docs/55_502e.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2010], p.6.

²⁴⁸ Rubin, 'Identifying Options and Entry Points for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Afghanistan', p.1.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p1.

Yet in absence of international security forces the Coalition had no viable alternative than to rely on local militias for some kind of security presence. The implications of this approach proved to be counterintuitive to peacebuilding. Ruthless and corrupt, the warlords returned to their old ways of terrorising the local population.²⁵⁰ Autonomous and untrustworthy, some warlords on the CIA payroll even assisted the insurgency by protecting former Taliban commanders.²⁵¹ Vast inducements, stolen aid money and improvised checkpoints ensured that local warlords were considerably wealthier than central government. This was contradictory to the political strategy, as it reaffirmed the notion that central authority was weak and irrelevant. As a result of empowering local militias the corrupt and defunct warlord system spiralled to a level that became completely unmanageable by both the Afghan government and UNAMA.

A DDR programme was not initiated until April 2003, well over a year after the fall of the Taliban.²⁵² By this time militias and their commanders had consolidated themselves, established spheres of control, and had genuine interests to protect. As the security situation further deteriorated a 'security dilemma' was created between rival militias where groups only felt secure by arming themselves against each other, creating a situation of perpetual insecurity.²⁵³ As anarchy became symptomatic of the security environment, it was logical that the power brokers would be individuals that could survive by means of force.

Even when the DDR programme was introduced critics argue that it failed to conjure up any enticing incentives to persuade militias to reintegrate with the broader society.²⁵⁴ The soaring price of opium made it financially prudent for armed groups to ignore reintegration programmes in favour of aiding the narcotics trade. Furthermore, Dirk Salomons makes the important point that without seductive alternatives the DDR strategy actually facilitated insurgent recruitment by creating aggrieved out-of-work militia men. These issues were particularly the case with mid-level commanders who were unsuitable for incorporation into national political or military structures but lived comfortably enough not to be allured by reintegration policies.²⁵⁵

To this day, the strategy towards warlords appears to be as perplexing as ever. Scholars too have found themselves puzzled by the simultaneous characterisation of Afghan warlords as both

²⁵⁰ Ahmed Rashid, "Setback as warlords return to old ways", *The Daily Telegraph* (12 January 2002) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1381249/Setback-as-warlords-return-to-old-ways.html>> [accessed 10 January 2011].

²⁵¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.128.

²⁵² 'Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme', UNDP (April 2003) <http://www.anbp.af.undp.org/homepage/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2:afghanistans-new-beginnings-programme&Itemid=2> [accessed 11 August 2010].

²⁵³ For a complete explanation of 'the Security Dilemma' see Barry R. Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival* 35:1 (1993), pp.27-47.

²⁵⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp.209-211.

²⁵⁵ Dirk Salomons, "Security: An Absolute Prerequisite" in *Postconflict Development: Meeting New Challenges*, ed. by Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren, (London: Lynne Rienner, 2005), p.20.

‘villains’ as well as ‘allies’.²⁵⁶ In parts of the country ‘warlords’ have simply re-branded their militias and traded their khaki for well pressed suits, allowing them to masquerade as professional private security companies.²⁵⁷ While the behaviour and motivations of these forces varies from case to case, it would appear that the sentiment among Western commanders in the field is just as mixed. Some are adamant these militias are part of the problem while others see them as crucial to stability.²⁵⁸ Whichever argument holds the greatest weight, it is clear that from the very outset the strategy towards ‘warlords’ was notably flawed by its ambiguity and inconsistencies.

Afghan National Forces

The approach towards Afghan National Forces proved to be more comprehensible. Ultimately the scheme was a type of DDR by default. In effect, militias would be disarmed, demobilised, integrated into Afghan National forces and then the process would revert by rearming and remobilising the same forces under the new brand of Afghan national forces.

After a shaky start for the Afghan National Army (ANA), this move has met with notable success at the time of writing. Rashid argues that the ANA “has become the single most successful U.S.-led nation-building exercise in Afghanistan.”²⁵⁹ Recruitment has been rapid and the ANA currently stands at above 140,000.²⁶⁰ Steadily the ANA has succeeded in instilling a sense of national pride as well as gaining the confidence of the Afghan people at the local level. Many reports in the field have been complimentary and capability has steadily improved.²⁶¹

However the situation now is far removed from that in 2003-5. As of February 2004, the ANA was only 7,000 strong.²⁶² At the recruit level, the soldiers were of dubious quality - very badly paid, mostly uneducated, frequently unfit, and inclined to desertion. Coalition officers spoke of the indiscipline and low levels of morale as well as the tendency towards banditry behaviour.²⁶³

²⁵⁶ Keith Stanski, ‘So these Folks are Aggressive’: An Orientalist Reading of ‘Afghan Warlords’, *Security Dialogue* 20:1 (2009), pp.73-94.

²⁵⁷ Dexter Filkins, “With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire”, *New York Times* (5 June 2010) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/06/world/asia/06warlords.html?th&emc=th>> [accessed 23 September 2010].

²⁵⁸ For examples of differing opinions see Matthew Rosenberg, “U.S. Courts Former Warlords in Its Bid for Afghan Stability”, *The Wall Street Journal* (20 March 2009) <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123749782452088727.html>> [accessed 23 September 2010].

²⁵⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.203.

²⁶⁰ ‘Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): Media Backgrounder’, *NATO* (26 October 2010), p.1.

²⁶¹ Major Robert W. Redding, ‘19th SF Group Utilizes MCA Missions to Train Afghan National Army Battalions’, *Special Warfare*, 17:3 (2005), pp.26-27.

²⁶² ‘Afghan National Army’, *Institute for the Study of War* (2010)

<<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/afghanistan-national-army-ana>> [accessed 10 January 2011].

²⁶³ James Fergusson, *A Million Bullets: The Real Story of the British Army in Afghanistan* (London: Bantam Press, 2008), pp.113-6.

On this basis, the creation of the ANA was at the very least a five-year plan and had no capacity to address the short-term security issues.

The situation with Afghanistan's National Police (ANP) has been more problematic. Observers suggest that the training proved to be rushed, half hearted and ineffective.²⁶⁴ Afghan civilians were reported as saying, "*Forget about the Taliban, our biggest problems are with the police*".²⁶⁵ Corruption within the ANP became totally endemic, nullifying its utility as a force for law and order. A DFID report from 2008 suggested that as many as 50 percent of the ANP were involved in illegal narcotics at some level.²⁶⁶ Despite efforts to instigate an effective police force, the ANP remained "*one of the most dysfunctional institutions in the country*".²⁶⁷

As of now, both the ANA and ANP are healthy at least in terms of numbers. Progress has been steady, leading Minister of Defence General Azimi, to state publicly that Afghan national forces are "*strong enough to take charge of security*".²⁶⁸ It remains to be seen whether this will be the case when foreign forces withdraw from front line combat duties in 2014. Nevertheless, even if this assessment is correct, the sustainability of such a force remains a concern for strategists. The funding that has backed the ANA and ANP has been unprecedented.²⁶⁹ Relative to GDP, Afghanistan's military budget was five times more than countries with even the highest levels of military spending.²⁷⁰ Critics have noted that even with a growth rate of 9 percent per annum and natural resource extraction improved by 12 percent (both unrealistic forecasts), in ten years' time the domestic revenue of the Afghan government will still only be \$2.5 billion. This would mean that, even in a decade, the Afghan security forces would cost significantly more than the country's total revenue – hardly a sustainable state of affairs.²⁷¹ Although international partners currently shoulder this burden, supposing foreign interest subsidies, the Afghan government will be left with an impossible bill to foot.

²⁶⁴ Training was outsourced to Germany and then to private security firm DynCorp. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.174.

²⁶⁵ An Afghan truck driver, comment in Ibid, p.172.

²⁶⁶ 'DFID Understanding Afghanistan: Strategic Conflict Assessment', DFID (November 2008), p.41.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p.41.

²⁶⁸ General Zahir Azimi, comment in Khwaja Basir Ahmad, "Afghan forces ready to take over security: defence ministry", *Pajhwok Afghan News* (20 October 2010) <<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2010/10/20/afghan-forces-ready-take-over-security-defence-ministry>> [accessed 23 October 2010].

²⁶⁹ Costs for the ANP supposedly amount to \$6 billion since 2002. See T. Christian Miller, Mark Hosenball and Ron Moreau, "\$6 Billion Later, Afghan Cops Aren't Ready to Serve", *ProPublica* (20 March 2010) <<http://www.propublica.org/article/six-billion-dollars-later-the-afghan-national-police-cant-begin-to-do>> [accessed 23 October 2010]. Meanwhile the ANA is apparently costing \$2.2 billion per year. See 'Security Forces', *Afghan Conflict Monitor* (September 2010) <<http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/securityforces.html>> [accessed 23 October 2010].

²⁷⁰ Rubin, 'Peace-Building and State-Building in Afghanistan: constructing sovereignty for whose security', p.181.

Insofar as ISAF were concerned, the foreign security presence in Afghanistan had three distinctive characteristics. Firstly, the number of foreign forces remained minimal as the strategy kept its commitment to the 'light footprint' approach. The second characteristic of the foreign security presence was its multilateral composition. Whereas the overthrow of the Taliban was predominantly orchestrated by local forces in partnership with the U.S., the responsibility for 'post conflict' security was essentially handed over to 7,000 ISAF troops from multiple NATO contributing countries.²⁷² The third characteristic of ISAF concerned the diverse and multidimensional military activities of the international security forces. On the one hand ISAF troops were absorbed in counterterrorist operations by engaging the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban. On the other hand, troops were also involved in more traditional counterinsurgency activities in an attempt to win the 'hearts and minds' (WHAM) of the Afghan population.²⁷³ This was deemed to be achieved by consolidating occupied territory, providing security to local populations and enabling reconstruction projects, thereby maintaining a sense of legitimacy with the local population and substantiating the new government.²⁷⁴ It was these principal characteristics that defined the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan between January 2003 and October 2008.

Firstly, the most palpable inconsistency of the strategy concerns the meagre contribution of international forces. By the end of 2002, there were only 8,000 U.S. troops based in Afghanistan, all of whom were involved in counterterrorist operations and did not engage in any peacekeeping activities.²⁷⁵ Even as late as April 2005, the number of foreign soldiers that were stationed in Afghanistan was a mere 18,000, of which only 8,000 were operational peacekeepers.²⁷⁶ In a country that had been decimated by decades of insecurity, it was implausible to assume this small number of international forces was enough to reverse the conflict cycle and finally stabilise Afghanistan.

²⁷¹ Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, 'From Great Game to Grand Bargain: Ending Chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan', *Foreign Affairs* 87:6 (2008) <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64604/barnett-r-rubin-and-ahmed-rashid/from-great-game-to-grand-bargain>> [accessed 11 December 2010].

²⁷² Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, p.112.

²⁷³ Winning hearts and minds (WHAM) is a strategy used in low intensity conflicts/insurgencies to win the support of the local population through soft soldiering that prioritises population protection and welfare to undermine the insurgent cause.

²⁷⁴ Lieutenant Roberts, in discussion with author, 20 August 2010.

²⁷⁵ David Rohde and David E. Sanger, "How a 'Good War' in Afghanistan Went Bad", *New York Times* (12 August 2007) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/world/asia/12afghan.html?pagewanted=1>> [accessed 30 August 2010].

²⁷⁶ Kruys, 'Post-Cold War/11 September 2001 Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency with specific reference to Iraq and Afghanistan', p.56.

Rumsfeld publically admitted that *"it's not logical to me that it would take as many forces following the conflict as it would to win the war"*.²⁷⁷ However established studies on successful peacekeeping missions directly contradict this policy of 'minimalist soldiering'. Dobbins contends that the number of peacekeepers must be ten times as high as the number required for conventional fighting in order to maintain stability.²⁷⁸ By Dobbins' recommendation, the number of troops needed in Afghanistan should have been in the hundreds of thousands. Clearly the situation in Afghanistan from 2003-8 was a long way from meeting this recommendation.

As a consequence, international forces controlled little more than urban areas while the rest of the country was left to militias, insurgents and anarchy. With most of the population living in isolated rural areas this strategy did not have the operational reach to immunise key demographics of the population from insurgency.²⁷⁹ Local people found themselves frequently exposed to the insurgents as ISAF troops moved on. This put the local population in an impossible position where they were confused over how, or even if, they should cooperate with counterinsurgency forces.²⁸⁰

Observers have consistently maintained that *"you can't beat a rural insurgency without a rural security presence"*.²⁸¹ Yet when ISAF forces ventured into rural territories to clear insurgents, they were left isolated in remote areas that were either tactically impossible or strategically irrelevant to hold. Consequently the security problems became self perpetuating; as one soldier observed: *"We move in, hold the ground and then have to move off again. As soon as we do that, the enemy move back in. It's a cat and mouse game and we never really have control... it's infuriating"*.²⁸² Even though international forces rarely lost a tactical engagement, one ISAF general admitted in mid-2007 that *"NATO and Afghan forces control at most 20 percent of the southern provinces"*.²⁸³ These worryingly honest interpretations from the field fully reveal the extent to which ISAF forces were completely inadequate in number to extend security across Afghanistan's dispersed populace and extensive landscape.

The second failing of the international strategy was related to the multinational character of ISAF and the disjointed and uncoordinated implementation of these forces in practice. With such a small number of troops, the tasks and territorial areas of Afghanistan were divided up among the NATO Coalition, with one country at a time taking the overarching responsibility of 'lead

²⁷⁷ Donald Rumsfeld, comment in David M. Edelstein, 'Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail', *International Security* 29:1 (2004), p.49.

²⁷⁸ Dobbins, 'Towards a More Professional Approach to Nation-building', p.82.

²⁷⁹ Thomas H. Johnson, and M. Chris Mason, 'All Counterinsurgency is Local', *The Atlantic*, (2008) <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/all-counterinsurgency-is-local/6965/>> [accessed 18 March 2009].

²⁸⁰ Fick and Nagl, 'Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition', p.44.

²⁸¹ Johnson and Mason, 'All Counterinsurgency is Local'.

²⁸² Lieutenant Davies, in discussion with author, 20 August 2010.

²⁸³ Anonymous Senior NATO military official, comment in Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.255.

nation'. Jones is one commentator who says that "*this approach was a disaster*".²⁸⁴ The frequent changes in the role of 'lead nation' meant there was little continuity. This was worsened by the fact that the 'lead nation' approach did not stipulate an overarching mandate, leaving military operations decentralised under the command of each contributing nation.

It was not long before the disjointed command structure began to reveal the different caveats amongst NATO countries.²⁸⁵ The operational mandate of contributing countries proved to be limited by an unwillingness to risk casualties. Operations were conducted simultaneously without coordination while rules of engagement varied enormously. Only in the last two years has the German military adjusted its rules of engagement after fervently refusing to commit to combat operations.²⁸⁶ Moreover other countries like Spain, France and Italy have all resisted sending troops to troublesome regions. This incoherent approach led Canadian Ambassador David Sproule to admit that "*the national caveats are a source of extraordinary tension within NATO*".²⁸⁷ The multilateral approach, theoretically a triumph for NATO, was actually highly flawed in practice with major inconsistencies concerning unity of purpose and strategic approach.

The third critique of the international forces in Afghanistan is related to the disjointed strategic focus of these forces. As far as U.S. troops were concerned, the operational strategy in Afghanistan after the overthrow of the Taliban regime was overwhelmingly focused on counterterrorism. From the outset Bush conceded he was unwilling to use U.S. troops in the event of a Taliban resurgence, telling his advisors "*I oppose using the military for nation-building. Once the job is done, our forces are not peacekeepers*".²⁸⁸ Instead U.S. forces concentrated on covert surgical tactics to combat the remnants of al Qaeda. The shift towards counterinsurgency was more accidental than it was a strategic preference. Even as late as 2004 Rumsfeld insisted that insurgency was not an issue in Afghanistan.²⁸⁹ It was only until two years after the fall of the Taliban regime that the U.S. strategy appeared to acknowledge that insurgency was the principal stumbling block to security. The state of denial finally gave way to reality and the security strategy began an arduous shift towards counterinsurgency and WHAM.

Yet even when the strategy theoretically shifted towards counterinsurgency there was a distinct reluctance to facilitate the process in practice. The classic example is the case of Provincial

²⁸⁴ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.240.

²⁸⁵ 'Caveats' refer to the operational limitations that NATO countries individually place on the use of their militaries.

²⁸⁶ James Joyner, "Afghanistan Caveats Coming to End", *AICGS Advisor* (16 February 2007) <<http://www.aicgs.org/analysis/c/Hanpeter021507.aspx>> [accessed 18 October 2010].

²⁸⁷ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.251.

²⁸⁸ Bush, comment in Woodward, *Bush at War*, p.237.

²⁸⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.252.

Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).²⁹⁰ The success and failures of the PRTs varied from case to case. However, retrospective reports suggest that in general PRTs “provided a positive international presence”.²⁹¹ Yet PRTs also suffered from the issues that had become endemic among ongoing security efforts. A USAID report accounts how lack of coordination and national caveats quickly revealed themselves in the PRTs as they had done with regular forces. The decentralised PRT structure crippled NATO’s capacity to establish an essential strategic purpose to the scheme. The report also found that PRTs were ineffective at addressing local security issues such as tribal disputes or narcotics trafficking.²⁹² Furthermore, Rashid argues that the quality of some PRT forces was dubious. Many were drawn from reservists and lacked the language skills, expertise and experience required for such complex and diverse operations.²⁹³ The association with aid and development also fashioned a new problem in ‘post conflict’ reconstruction where development organisations and security forces became indivisible in the eyes of the local population. Frequently, NGOs were unwilling to work alongside PRTs for fear that doing so might lead them to become associated with the military and tarnish their aura of neutrality, undermine their humanitarian spirit, and potentially lead them to becoming targets in the insurgency.²⁹⁴ This subverted the effectiveness of the essential relationship between the PRTs and civilian organisations.

Yet this is not to suggest that the PRT presence was significant enough to combat security issues in the first place. The limited number of PRTs, which amounted to a mere 22 at their peak in 2005, meant that their work was mostly concentrated in the immediate vicinity of district capitals and not in the remote countryside where WHAM was most required.²⁹⁵ Although in principal the PRTs were a dynamic instrument for counterinsurgency and winning hearts and minds, the case study plainly reveals how the strategy refused to apply the available ‘means’ to enable the strategy to meet its objectives.

The fourth critique of the international presence in Afghanistan concerns how field tactics proved to be contradictory to a counterinsurgency strategy. It is generally accepted that a counterinsurgency strategy necessitates protecting the population, thereby winning their support,

²⁹⁰ PRTs were small units of roughly 100 soldiers and civilians who engaged in a wide range of tasks including expanding governance capability, small scale local reconstruction projects, assessing and attending to humanitarian needs, establishing relations between United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the local community, gathering intelligence on al Qaeda and the vague task of generally providing security.

²⁹¹ Robert M. Perito, ‘The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified’, *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, 152 (2005), p.15.

²⁹² ‘Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment’, *USAID* (June 2006), p.12.

²⁹³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.200.

²⁹⁴ Paul O’Brien, ‘Rights-based responses to aid politicization in Afghanistan’, in *Reinventing Development* ed. Paul Gready and Jonathan Ensor (London: Zed Books, 2005), pp.201-225, (pp.212-213).

²⁹⁵ Perito, ‘The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan’, p.15.

pacifying the grievances of insurgent-minded individuals and establishing political legitimacy.²⁹⁶ Although the strategy in Afghanistan eventually assumed counterinsurgency as its credo, it discounted these crucial principles in the tactics that were employed.

The most blatant contradiction was the overreliance on fire support. Limited security forces on the ground, coupled with a fear of casualties, ensured the best means of force protection was intense fire power and air support.²⁹⁷ However, by transforming into an insurgency, the exercise of these tactical weapons became increasingly challenging. The enemy was no longer conventionally massed but instead operated as small mobile units often immersed within the general population. Unclear on the radar whether the targets were insurgents, civilians or a herd of goats, the whole tactic of long range bombing became far less effective and mistakes began to accumulate.²⁹⁸

The full strategic impact of collateral damage really came to the fore in July 2002 when a wedding party was bombed after indulging in the time honoured Afghan tradition of celebrating by firing weapons into the air. The story, but one of many, encouraged a backlash from Afghan civilians as well as from the international community.²⁹⁹ As the insurgency gathered momentum from 2005 to 2008, the number of air strikes increased significantly.³⁰⁰ In 2008, civilian casualties caused by Coalition forces had increased nearly fourfold since the year 2006.³⁰¹ Over several months between 2002 and 2008, the number of civilians killed by ISAF forces was higher than those killed by insurgents.³⁰² This has proven desperately damaging to the strategic imperative of WHAM.³⁰³

Scholars and military officials alike both acknowledge that air support can only ever be a supplementary tactical tool.³⁰⁴ Senior officers on the ground have recognised that “*to win the*

²⁹⁶ Richard Engel, ‘So what is the actual surge strategy?’, *NBC News* (2 December 2009)

<<http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2009/12/02/2140281.aspx>> [accessed 13 December 2010].

²⁹⁷ ‘Troops in Contact: Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan’, *Human Rights Watch* (8 September 2008), p.12.

²⁹⁸ Elisabeth Bumiller, ‘From a Carrier, Another View of America’s Air War in Afghanistan’, *New York Times* (24 February 2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/world/asia/24carrier.html?_r=1> [accessed 24 October 2010].

²⁹⁹ ‘Scores killed’ in US Afghan raid”, *BBC News*, (1 July 2002)

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2079565.stm> [accessed 24 October 2010].

³⁰⁰ ‘Troops in Contact’, *Human Rights Watch*, p.13.

³⁰¹ ‘Civilian casualties in Afghanistan’, *UNAMA*,

<<https://spreadsheets.google.com/ccc?key=t6DxfC53zMzKyeAW57nBpsg#gid=0>> [accessed 24 October 2010].

³⁰² ‘Casualties: Civilians’, *Afghan Conflict Monitor* (9 March 2011)

<<http://www.conflictmonitors.org/countries/afghanistan/facts-and-figures/casualties/civilians>> [accessed 10 May 2011].

³⁰³ ‘Hearts, minds and death’, *The Economist* (10 May 2007)

<http://www.economist.com/node/9164957?story_id=9164957> [accessed 24 October 2010], and Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, ‘Losing Afghanistan, One Civilian at a Time’, *New American Foundation* (18 November 2007) <http://www.newamerica.net/publications/articles/2007/losing_afghanistan_one_civilian_time_6322> [accessed 24 October 2010].

³⁰⁴ Reese, ‘Precision Firepower: Smart Bombs, Dumb Strategy’, p.50.

insurgency, we're not going to bomb our way out of this".³⁰⁵ Former supreme commander, General Petraeus, also supported this suggestion by claiming *"every Afghan civilian death diminishes our cause"*.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, Erica Gaston argues that the collateral damage involved makes air strikes a counter-productive means of fighting an insurgency.³⁰⁷ To support Gaston's argument, reports from the field suggest that *"often insurgents carry out a terrorist act or guerrilla raid with the primary purpose of enticing counterinsurgents to overreact"* and turn the population against them.³⁰⁸ As a tactic of the insurgents, this appears to be effective: an opinion poll in 2008 revealed that nearly 40 percent of Taliban sympathisers were at least partly motivated by the effects of civilian casualties from NATO air strikes.³⁰⁹ Other critics such as Robert A. Pape maintain that air attacks are an ineffective means of targeting an enemy in the first place.³¹⁰ The incapacity to decapitate al Qaeda's leadership earlier in the campaign is testament to this. Indeed, as T.R. Ferhrenbeck observes: *"You may fly over a land forever; you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it and wipe it clean of life – but if you desire to defend it, to protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground...by putting your young men into the mud"*.³¹¹ Whatever the tactical benefits of firepower, the consensus among commentators and military professional alike is that the 'bona fide' dimensions of an insurgency can only be addressed by putting boots on the ground.

In summary, the multidimensional, multilateral and minimalist strategy was highly flawed. Numerically insufficient, lacking in coherence, strategically inconsistent and tactically counterintuitive, the foreign presence made an ineffective contribution to the security situation in Afghanistan. With these strategic failings, combined with the internal conflict dynamics of Afghanistan, the foundations for an intractable rural insurgency had been laid.

Pakistan's Safe Havens

Once the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban escaped across the border after the Coalition's failed attempt to round them up in the mountainous border regions, any doubts about Pakistan's significance in the Afghan conflict became null and void. The rigid political boundary that carves its way through the region has been ignored by local populations ever since the Durand line was

³⁰⁵ Colonel Harry A. Foster, comment in Bumiller, "From a Carrier, Another View of America's Air War in Afghanistan".

³⁰⁶ General David Petraeus, comment in Phil Stewart, "Petraeus clarifies rules on Afghan air strikes", *Reuters* (5 August 2010) < <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE67361P20100805> > [accessed 26 October 2010].

³⁰⁷ Erica Gaston, 'More airstrikes won't help in Afghanistan', *AfPak Channel, Foreign Policy* (26 October 2010) <http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/26/more_airstrikes_wont_help_in_afghanistan> [accessed 26 October 2010].

³⁰⁸ General David Petraeus, comment in Bergen and Tiedemann, "Losing Afghanistan, One Civilian at a Time".

³⁰⁹ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.306.

³¹⁰ See Robert A. Pape, 'The True Worth of Air Power', *Foreign Affairs* 83:2 (2004), pp.116-130.

first introduced in 1893.³¹² The border region (formally known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas - FATA) is a territory of about 27,500 sq km of thick forests and mountainous terrain. This uninviting environment is home to around 3.5 million Pashtuns and 1.5 million Afghan refugees. In the FATA, poverty levels are high and conservative Islam is predominant. Politically the region has consistently proven itself to be immune to the influence of central authority.³¹³ The combination of these factors meant that the FATA provided an ideal 'safe haven' for displaced Taliban and al Qaeda fighters.³¹⁴

Without a mandate to operate in Pakistan, Coalition forces on the other side of the border were helpless in combating these areas and their insurgent occupants. It was widely believed that the FATA became the new headquarters for the insurgency and operations centre, whereupon al Qaeda and its related groups were able to organise its attacks post 9/11, including the London, Madrid and Bali bombings.³¹⁵ If ever a territorial entity could be described as the heart of Islamic terrorism, the FATA became the most compelling candidate.

As we have already discussed, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Pakistan made a conscious u-turn by renouncing the Taliban and offering the U.S. its full support. On the face of it, the capture of a few fleeing al Qaeda and Taliban groups suggested that Pakistan was fulfilling its pledge.³¹⁶ President Musharraf and the Pakistani army publically declared that the FATA was a terrorist free area.³¹⁷ In reality this was far from the case. The protected status of the FATA region allowed insurgents to use it as a springboard for attacks across the border and then return to safety.³¹⁸ As one U.S. marine was quoted as saying, "*The Taliban sanctuary...is catastrophic for us...Taliban fighters get strategic and operational guidance from across the border, as well as supplies and technical components for their improvised explosive devices*".³¹⁹ As a result of this critical factor, there is widespread

³¹¹ T.R. Ferhrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), p.427.

³¹² The Durand line was named after the British Foreign Secretary to India, Henry Durand. The demarcation was established as the territorial border between Afghanistan and British India. To this day the Durand represents the official border between Pakistan and Afghanistan however many Pashtuns and Afghans refuse to acknowledge it.

³¹³ Information taken from Shuja Nawaz, 'FATA – A Most Dangerous Place: Meeting the Challenge of Militancy and Terror in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (January 2009) <http://csis.org/files/media/CSIS/pubs/081218_nawaz_fata_web.pdf> [accessed 6 December 2010], pp.1-7.

³¹⁴ For an in depth discussion see Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001).

³¹⁵ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.265.

³¹⁶ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, pp.97-98.

³¹⁷ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.269.

³¹⁸ 'Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants', *International Crisis Group* (11 December 2006) <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/125-pakistans-tribal-areas-appeasing-the-militants.aspx>> [accessed 10 December 2010].

³¹⁹ Anonymous U.S. Marine, comment in Seth G. Jones, "Take the War to Pakistan", *New York Times* (4 December 2009) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/04/opinion/04jones.html?th&emc=th>> [accessed 10 December 2010].

agreement among analysts that the safe havens in Pakistan were crucial in enabling the Taliban's resurgence.³²⁰

Looking beyond the smoke and mirrors, it was probably unrealistic to expect Islamabad's dramatic shift at the official level to be reflected in the field where ISI and Pakistani forces had assisted and worked alongside Islamist fighters as partners for decades.³²¹ While the U.S. and her allies were determined to rid the region of militant fundamentalism, by contrast Pakistan historically colluded with these groups as strategic assets in the conflict with India.³²² With a new government in Kabul, India was gifted with unprecedented strategic opportunities to elevate themselves as a principal regional player and pressurise Pakistan from a second front.³²³ After years of sponsoring the Mujahedeen against the Taliban, largely in vain, India was finally granted its strategic opening. As far as Pakistan was concerned, the U.S. had effectively "*handed the keys of Kabul to India's proxies*".³²⁴

Seemingly oblivious to this complex regional dilemma, the strategy did little to alter the fundamental calculus of the Pakistani security concerns. India was instantly allowed to make its presence in Afghanistan known with multiple investments in numerous infrastructure and reconstruction projects that stretched up to the border of Pakistan.³²⁵ As India's influence in Kabul grew, so too did Pakistan's unease, while the international community remained largely apathetic.³²⁶

Instead of addressing these developments, U.S. strategy opted to avoid the political minefield of the India-Pakistan conflict entirely and instead adopt a policy of dehyphenation, seeking to engage with both India and Pakistan autonomously "*without becoming hostage to the vicissitudes of Indian-Pakistani relations*".³²⁷ Yet whatever increased dialogue can be achieved through dehyphenation, critics note that unless the structural issues are addressed, essentially it can only accomplish superficial diplomatic gestures.³²⁸ The narrative surrounding the India-Pakistan conflict has been formulated for the better part of a century ensuring that the most rudimentary

³²⁰ C. Christine Fair, 'Obama's New "Af-Pak" Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?', *The Centre for International Governance Innovation* The Afghanistan Papers No. 6 (July 2010), p.16.

³²¹ For an insight into the ISI's complex relationship with militant Islamic groups see Mary Anne Weaver, *Pakistan: In the Shadow of Jihad and Afghanistan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), in particular pp.201-203, 250-262.

³²² Ibid, pp.250-251.

³²³ C. Christine Fair, 'India in Afghanistan and Beyond: Opportunities and Constraints', *The Century Foundation* (September 2010) < <http://tcf.org/publications/2010/9/india-in-afghanistan-and-beyond-opportunities-and-constraints/pdf> > [11 December 2010], p.8.

³²⁴ Ibid, p.17.

³²⁵ Ibid, pp.11-15.

³²⁶ S. Azmat Hassan, "Growing Indian influence in Afghanistan alarms Pakistan", *WorldFocus* (18 March 2010) <<http://worldfocus.org/blog/2010/03/18/growing-indian-influence-in-afghanistan-alarms-pakistan/10095/>> [accessed 11 December 2010].

³²⁷ Ashley J. Tellis, 'The Merits of Dehyphenation: Explaining U.S. Success in Engaging India and Pakistan,' *Washington Quarterly* 31:4 (2008), p.36.

³²⁸ See Rubin and Rashid, 'From Great Game to Grand Bargain', pp.30-44.

of trust is totally absent.³²⁹ Steven Coll argues that the consequence of this is that both India and Pakistan hold “*unshakable assumptions about the other’s proclivity for dirty tricks*”.³³⁰ U.S. strategists were at best naïve and at worst overtly conceited to assume Pakistan would abandon its long-term security concerns in order to confront the enemy of America.

In this context, from the spring of 2002 until 2007 Pakistan’s efforts in the ‘War on Terror’ became increasingly futile. The practical implications were calamitous to security efforts. From as early as 2002, U.S. officers complained that Pakistani Frontier Corps were helping al Qaeda cross the border by providing them with support fire. Meanwhile reports suggested that ISI operatives continued to assist and work alongside insurgents independent of Islamabad.³³¹

The pressure mounted to the extent that in mid-march 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell supposedly gave Musharraf an ultimatum; either clear terrorism from the FATA or the U.S. military would carry out the task instead.³³² By the end of March 2004, Musharraf’s commitment to the FATA region stepped up a gear. However the results were still unimpressive. In an offensive in 2004, the troops sent in to tackle the insurgents were the Frontier Corps and not the regular army. Poorly trained and with a tendency towards desertion they were hardly the professional outfit required for dealing with a formidable foe and gruelling insurgency. Even with additional troops sent throughout the course of 2005-6 the Pakistani effort was half-hearted at best and therefore it is of little surprise that the outcome was a military stalemate. The Pakistani troops occupied the central administrative hubs but were unwilling to venture out of their bases, thereby allowing the insurgents to tighten their grip on the rural population and continue their movements into Afghanistan with relative ease.³³³

To make matters worse, much to Washington’s horror, Pakistani commanders entered into numerous deals with the insurgents. The consequences of negotiated ceasefires were predictable; while the insurgents temporarily suspended their attacks on Pakistani forces, they were given a free reign to launch incursions into Afghanistan to take on ISAF.³³⁴ As a consequence of these events, from the period 2002-2006, insurgent and terrorist groups in the FATA continued to operate, relatively unimpeded.

³²⁹ For an overview of past operations and the distrust caused between India and Pakistan see Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2000).

³³⁰ Steven Coll, “The Back Channel”, *The New Yorker* (2 March 2009) <http://www.newamerica.net/publications/articles/2009/back_channel_11191> [accessed 12 December 2010].

³³¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.269.

³³² Ibid, p.270.

³³³ Ibid, p.276.

³³⁴ Anwar Iqbal, “Taliban Command Structure in FATA Alarms US”, *Dawn* (28 December 2006) <<http://dawnnews.tv/2006/12/28/top1.htm>> [accessed 9 December 2010].

Although it was self evident to commentators, policy makers and ground troops that “*stabilizing Pakistan is a prerequisite to stabilising Afghanistan*”,³³⁵ the strategy in Afghanistan did not reflect this reality. For five years, the strategy appeared to be relatively nonchalant with the Coalition simply assuming Pakistan would confront the insurgents residing in the FATA. In a press conference in 2006, Bush made his support of Musharraf very public, stating, “*When the president looks me in the eye and says...that there won't be a Taliban and won't be Al Qaeda, I believe him*”.³³⁶ Yet while Bush publically reinforced his trust in Pakistan, the increasing scale of the insurgency made it clear to observers that the failure to appreciate the significance of Pakistan and the wider regional dimensions had played the greatest part in undermining the entire counterinsurgency effort to date.³³⁷ In the face of glaringly obvious links between the insurgency’s revival and Pakistan, it took until the winter of 2007-8 before the FATA dimension was given strategic prioritisation.³³⁸

Summary – Consolidating Security

For many observers, the failure to ensure a comprehensive security strategy was a significant factor behind the collapse of the entire nation-building programme for Afghanistan.³³⁹ As Dirk Salomons wrote: “*Without the prospect of security there is no hope*”.³⁴⁰ Above, four strategic dimensions have been outlined which ensured the strategy was inadequate in addressing the security situation in Afghanistan during this phase.

The first issue was the ad-hoc improvised approach in dealing with local warlords and militias. Although the strategy involved a DDR programme, as used in classic peacebuilding strategies, the design was faulty and failed to entice former combatants to lay down arms. Furthermore, in contradiction of the DDR approach, the 'light footprint' necessitated that militias and warlords were utilised as informal security forces.

³³⁵ Lindley-French, comment in Lindley-French, Saikal and Rubin, “The Way Forward in Afghanistan: Three Views”, p.94.

³³⁶ George Bush, comment on Michael Abramowitz and Karen DeYoung, “Bush Seeks Increased Pakistani Cooperation”, *The Washington Post* (23 September 2006) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/22/AR2006092200105.html>> [accessed 20 March 2010].

³³⁷ Lindley-French, comment in Lindley-French, Saikal and Rubin, “The Way Forward in Afghanistan: Three Views”, p.94.

³³⁸ The 2008 paper from the U.S. Government Accountability Office fully revealed the extent to which the safe havens in Pakistan had been neglected by the previous strategy by clearly stating that “*the United States has not met its national security goals to destroy terrorist threats and close the safe havens in Pakistan’s FATA*”. See ‘Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas’, *United States Government Accountability Office*.

³³⁹ Federico Carbonari and Antonella Deledda, ‘Afghanistan: A Change of Course?’, *Transitional Studies Review* 15 (2008), p.474.

³⁴⁰ Salomons, “Security: An Absolute Prerequisite”, p.19.

Secondly, although Afghan National forces are now impressive in number and increasingly more capable, they were inadequate at providing security in the short term. The fact that major apprehensions over the credibility and capacity of Afghan Forces still remain suggests that effective local 'ownership' of the security was never going to be enough to establish stability in the case of a complex insurgency in the short term.

Thirdly, foreign troops might have made a positive contribution to the security situation. However, ISAF were misdirected, uncoordinated and too small in number to constructively enforce security. In an insurgency the consequence of perpetual insecurity is that the counterinsurgents slowly lose the hearts and minds of the population.³⁴¹ This situation was worsened by the tactical reliance on deadly fire support which perpetuated grievances when it was misdirected and tarnished the image of foreign troops in the eyes of the Afghan people. When all these factors were combined, it revealed a strategy that was at odds with principles of counterinsurgency and WHAM.³⁴²

Finally, this section analysed the futile attempt to construct a regional strategy to confront the 'safe havens' in Pakistan. Insurgents had found a welcome retreat from which they were able to enter Afghanistan, fight and retire, as though it was a routine commute. The U.S. failed to rouse Pakistan into confronting the FATA region by demonstrating either a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to address the wider regional issues by which Pakistan's security concerns are held hostage.

Many of these issues remain pervasive today. There continues to be an incoherent strategy with regard to warlords and their militias while the debate over the capacity of the ANA to take the lead role in the security effort has become one of, if not the, most critical concern for commentators. Furthermore, success in Afghanistan remains entirely dependent on Pakistan's efforts to confront domestic militancy, and a degenerative security environment in the north-west of the country does little to instil much hope in that regard. The debate between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency continues to be hotly contested while the fragile balance between fire support and collateral damage, although better managed, remains a careful balancing act.³⁴³ Even as the strategy for Afghanistan has been prioritised and adapted, some of these issues continue to challenge commentators and policy makers alike.

³⁴¹ Fick and Nagl, 'Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition', p.45.

³⁴² David Kilcullen, 'Counterinsurgency Redux', *Small Wars Journal* (2006) <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen1.pdf>> [accessed 10 May 2009].

³⁴³ For an example of the case in favour of counterinsurgency see; Bruce Riedel, 'Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy Should Stay the Course', *Brookings Institute* (16 December 2010) <http://www.brookings-tsinghua.cn/sitecore/content/Home/opinions/2010/1216_afghanistan_riedel.aspx> [accessed 4 May 2011], and by contrast for an example of the argument in favour of counterterrorism see; C. Christine Fair, 'False Choices in

Objective: Social Development

Aid and development as a tool of U.S. foreign policy has been a customary aspect of nation-building strategy ever since the Marshall Plan following the end of World War II.³⁴⁴ In Afghanistan the logic was no different. As Bush publically stated, "*We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror*".³⁴⁵ Just as the Marshall plan had been fashioned to prevent social, economic or political fallout after the destruction of the War in Europe, in Afghanistan the aid and development efforts were focused on reversing conditions in an environment that had become conducive to terrorism.

In order to achieve the desired progress, it was recognised that significant donor support would be required. However, in line with the 'light footprint' approach, the documents outlining the aid and development strategy were "*peppered with the language of ownership*"³⁴⁶ in the hope that improved socio-economic development would legitimise the new government. A strategy combining international assistance with local implementation was set out in an ambitious plan to develop Afghanistan.

On the 21st January 2002, sixty countries came together in Tokyo to discuss the reconstruction project in Afghanistan. The magnitude of the development tasks made the project a daunting prospect. War had ravaged the cities and shattered most of the infrastructure. Public services were effectively non-existent. Drought had wrecked the limited agricultural production. Only a quarter of the population had safe water, one in eight had adequate sanitation and one in fifteen had electricity.³⁴⁷ The socio-economic situation in Afghanistan was drastic indeed. The initial predictions were that Afghanistan would require an estimated \$1.7 billion in aid for the first year, \$10.2 billion for the next five years and \$14.6 billion for the next ten years.³⁴⁸ These were intimidating figures that would require a significant commitment. However, it was soon self-evident that the 'light footprint' approach and the shift in focus to Iraq would mean that the aid and development strategy in Afghanistan would not be given this capacity to pull Afghanistan out of destitution.

Afghanistan', *AfPak Channel, Foreign Policy* (11 January 2011)

<http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/11/false_choices_in_afghanistan> [accessed 2 February 2011].

³⁴⁴ For a comprehensive synopsis of the Marshall Plan see Alan S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

³⁴⁵ George Bush, comment on "Afghanistan's Marshall Plan", *New York Times* (19 April 2002)

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/19/opinion/afghanistan-s-marshall-plan.html>> [accessed 26 October 2010].

³⁴⁶ Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra, 'Who Owns the Peace?', *Disasters*, 34:1 (2010), p.79.

³⁴⁷ Brynen, 'Donor Assistance: Lessons from Palestine for Afghanistan', pp.234-235.

This is not to suggest that aid and development efforts in Afghanistan over this period did not experience any successes. Under the 'Back-to-School' programme, over 4,000 new schools were opened between 2002 and 2010.³⁴⁹ It is now estimated that well over seven million Afghan children (boys and girls) are able to attend schools, a noteworthy improvement from 2001 where enrolment was merely two million (only boys).³⁵⁰ In economic development, a major achievement was the creation of a new and stable currency. The new 'Afghani' was backed by the U.S. Federal Reserve and was valued at 50 Afghanis to \$1, a noteworthy improvement on the previous 48,000 Afghanis to \$1. Lockhart argues that this important development initiated an epoch of progressive economic reform from 2002 to 2004.³⁵¹ There were also considerable successes in the distribution of humanitarian aid.³⁵² Reports have revealed how humanitarian aid played a major role in ensuring the wellbeing of thousands of Afghans struggling in abject poverty and how emergency food programmes saved vast numbers from starvation.³⁵³ In providing the most basic levels of what is popularly termed 'human security', approximately five million Afghan refugees living abroad were able to return with the assistance of international humanitarian relief agencies.³⁵⁴

With these somewhat isolated success stories in education, macroeconomic reform and humanitarian relief, on the surface the aid and development project in Afghanistan had got off to a steady start. Furthermore these achievements are worth mentioning as they reveal that there was potential for the Afghan aid and development undertaking to have a positive impact. However, beyond this the aid and development strategy was notably lacking in anything more long term or institutional.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p.235.

³⁴⁹ 'Afghan Update: The Education for All Edition', *UNAMA* (Summer 2010) <<http://unama.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=Afghan+Updatepercent2fAU+Education+English+No.+23.pdf&tabid=1763&mid=2026>> [accessed 26 October 2010], p.3.

³⁵⁰ 'Education for All Edition', *UNESCO Afghan Update* 23 (Summer 2010).

³⁵¹ Claire Lockhart, 'The Aid Relationship in Afghanistan: Struggling for Government Leadership', *Global Economic Governance Programme GEG Working Paper*, (2007) <http://www.globaleconomicgovernance.org/wp-content/uploads/lockhart_afghanistan_2007-271.pdf> [accessed 26 October 2010].

³⁵² Definitions of humanitarian aid vary considerably and frequently coincide with broader notions of aid and development. In this instance we understand humanitarian aid to be the provision of aid to individuals and groups in life threatening positions.

³⁵³ Lydia Poole, "Humanitarian aid in conflict : More money, more problems?", *Global Humanitarian Assistance* (8 July 2010) <<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/humanitarian-aid-in-conflict-more-money-more-problems-561.html>> [accessed 26 October 2010].

³⁵⁴ Khalid Hosseini, 'Afghanistan Needs Teachers and Clean Water as Much as More Troops', *New Perspectives Quarterly* 26:1 (2009), p.35.

Bearing in mind the dire socio-economic state of affairs in Afghanistan, it should have been clear that genuine development could not be achieved by simply addressing the humanitarian crisis and initiating very basic aid programmes. Yet Rashid argues this was the style of reconstruction that Washington favoured.³⁵⁵ Similar to the approach to political peacebuilding, it seems that easily perceptible 'quick fix' solutions were used to impart an impression of progress that would act as a catalyst for nation-building in general.³⁵⁶ However, not enough thought was devoted to long-term projects that would encourage the growth of sustainable institutions, stimulate the local economy and move Afghanistan towards a degree of self sufficiency. In the rush to achieve swift implementation of short-term projects, the foundations for long-term development were frequently undermined.

Instead of reinforcing the legitimacy of the fragile new government by providing 'ownership' of aid and development as stipulated in the 'light footprint' approach, the strategy actively contradicted this aim.³⁵⁷ Of money that was pledged at the Tokyo agreements, around \$700 million went to UN agencies while a mere \$100 million went to the Afghan administration.³⁵⁸ The consequence was that the development of Afghan institutions remained largely dormant. The most notorious example of this is the failure to create a credible justice system, deemed by many scholars to be a fundamental pre-requisite to nation-building.³⁵⁹ By 2006, a World Bank report found that the justice system in Afghanistan was ranked in the bottom five percent of the world.³⁶⁰

Furthermore, Rashid argues that neglecting the construction of roads was a major strategic error.³⁶¹ Road infrastructure was essential in enabling Afghanistan to re-establish itself as a trading nation between Asia and the subcontinent. The construction of roads would also have political benefits by enabling the Kabul government to extend its influence into the anarchic peripheries of the country. As one U.S. general put it; "*where the road ends, the Taliban begins*".³⁶²

³⁵⁵ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp.176-178.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p.178.

³⁵⁷ Goodhand and Sedra, 'Who Owns the Peace?', p.79.

³⁵⁸ Statistic from Ignatieff, *Empire lite*, p.98.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, p.101.

³⁶⁰ 'Governance Matters 2008: Worldwide Governance Indicators, 1996-2007', *World Bank* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2008).

³⁶¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.192.

³⁶² Anonymous U.S. General, comment in Fick and Nagl, 'Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition', p.45.

To undermine government capacity further, the few high-quality local workers were quickly snatched up by NGOs instead of being channelled towards local enterprises. Ashraf Ghani, the Minister of Finance, lamented that within six months of starting his job in the ministry “[his] best people had been stolen by international aid organizations who could offer them forty to a hundred times the salary [the Afghan government] could”.³⁶³ Not unconnected with this was the extensive employment of foreign workers in preference of locals. The rationale behind using foreign workers was again stimulated by the need for immediate results but this made no contribution to long-term local skill development or lowering unemployment. Perhaps most startlingly, some scholars estimate that through this approach almost 40 percent of aid returned to donor countries in the form of salaries and corporate profits.³⁶⁴ Other more critical assessments state that a mere 10 percent of the aid money that went into Afghanistan actually made it to the population with the rest being lost in administration, logistics and corruption.³⁶⁵

In order to implement localised projects, aid and development agencies were encouraged to form partnerships with local warlords, further undermining the credibility and authority of the central government in Kabul. Once projects were completed, they fell under the control of the district warlord and some opportunistically used this to entrench their legitimacy and gain substantial incomes. One estimate suggests that this deprived the government of around 84 percent of its anticipated annual revenues.³⁶⁶ Association with warlords also meant that development became entangled with corruption and the negative stigma with which warlords were associated.

The evidence outlined above suggests that implementation of aid and development was directly contradictory to the strategic notion of Afghan 'ownership'. Aid experts consistently maintain that the “recipient government should be in the driver's seat”.³⁶⁷ However in the case of Afghanistan, it was the development agencies at the wheel, with warlords along for the ride, and central government barely a passenger. Under these circumstances the aid and development strategy fell at the first hurdle. The strategy invested in short-term projects but was insufficient in kickstarting the local economy, developing institutions and human skills or providing credibility to the new government.

³⁶³ Ashraf Ghani, comment in Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.181.

³⁶⁴ Goodhand and Sedra, 'Who Owns the Peace?', p.89.

³⁶⁵ Afghan Member of Parliament Ramazan Bashardost, comment in “Ugly Truth about Foreign Aid in Afghanistan”, *Global Research* (12 May 2009) <<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=13578>> [accessed 10 December 2010].

³⁶⁶ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.186.

³⁶⁷ Masahiro Kawai, 'A Message from Asia: Ownership, Institutions and Markets', *OECD Forum*, (2005), <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/23/5/34827704.pdf>> [accessed 12 August 2009], p.3.

The second issue with the aid and development strategy was the inability to meet the demands of the Afghan people. In essence the aid and development strategy was intimately linked to the strategy of WHAM. With development projects in post-conflict societies, nurturing satisfaction within the perceptions of the local recipients is surely essential to avoid conflict reviving.³⁶⁸ In this sense the aid and development commitments had to deliver. As Ignatieff writes; “*the Afghans heard the promises. Now they are waiting for the money*”.³⁶⁹

The commitments made in Japan were hugely optimistic and perhaps this inflated Afghan expectations to unrealistically high levels.³⁷⁰ Although development organisations might pronounce relative successes in Afghanistan comparative to the low base level, essentially there are several reasons why this sentiment is not shared among the local population. The helpful micro study by Antonio Donini reveals this enormous disconnect between how the aid agencies perceived success compared to the local Afghans.³⁷¹ From an empirical perspective, in many ways the Afghan cynicism is wholly justified. Unemployment consistently remained around 40 percent and by 2005 only a mere six percent of the population had access to power from the electricity grid.³⁷² In terms of perception, many believed that aid was not in line with their actual needs, whilst some complained that its distribution discriminated against certain ethnic groups.³⁷³ Another study of the aid and development programme discovered that the principal beneficiaries of aid were actually the ‘urban elite’ and not the rural poor to whom it should have been targeted.³⁷⁴ With perhaps the exception of education, basic services failed to reach the Afghan rural population. So long as the most basic expectations failed to be met, in the minds of the locals, that would be enough to tarnish the operation.

Underpinning the devotion to short-term strategies and a failure to meet perceptions, the third failing of the aid and development strategy is the most incriminating; the lack of commitment. The scale of the neglect is evidently visible in comparison to the reconstruction effort in Iraq. In his request to the treasury, Bush asked for \$20 billion for Iraq but only \$1.2 billion for Afghanistan.³⁷⁵ This plainly reveals how Afghanistan had been put “*on the back burner in*

³⁶⁸ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War’, *American Political Science Review* 97: 1 (2003), p.88 and John D. Montgomery and Dennis A. Rondinelli, *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan, Lessons from Development Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³⁶⁹ Ignatieff, *Empire life*, p.95.

³⁷⁰ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.172.

³⁷¹ Antonio Donini, ‘Local Perceptions of Assistance to Afghanistan’, *International Peacekeeping* 14:1 (2007), pp.158-172.

³⁷² See Afghanistan', *CIA World Factbook*, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>> [accessed 1 October 2010] and Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.184.

³⁷³ Goodhand and Sedra, ‘Who Owns the Peace?’, p.94.

³⁷⁴ ‘Voter Education Planning Survey: Afghanistan 2004 National Elections’, *The Asia Foundation* (July 2004), p.105.

³⁷⁵ O’Brien, ‘Rights-based responses to aid politicization in Afghanistan’, p.216.

Washington".³⁷⁶ Other foreign donors were no better at meeting their promises. Up to 2008 only \$15 billion of the \$25 billion promised to Afghanistan had been delivered. The bulk of this shortfall fell in the crucial period for reconstruction.³⁷⁷

This was contradictory to all maxims of post-conflict reconstruction. Experts with the RAND organisation predicted that the minimum figure required to stabilise post conflict countries was \$100 per capita.³⁷⁸ In Afghanistan, the figure only came to \$57.³⁷⁹ Subsequently, even with the correct projects specifically directed at meeting Afghan needs, the development undertaking for Afghanistan would never be given the crucial capacity to begin the process of hauling the country out of the misery of enduring conflict.

These three failings - the lack of long-term development projects, the failure to meet perceptions, and the critical lack of commitment - meant that not only did the strategy contradict its original design but its fickle implementation meant it was impossible to meet its overambitious objectives.

Narcotics

It is appropriate at this juncture to look at a specific dynamic of the Afghan conflict. Although predominantly a socio-economic issue, the narcotics problem is the ultimate crosscutting issue, provoking both security and political consequences as well. Studies of narcotics and conflict plainly reveal that although narcotics "*have no link to conflict initiation...they are positively correlated with conflict duration*".³⁸⁰ Afghanistan is an archetypal example.

In Afghanistan, poppy production increased practically every single year since the invasion in 2001.³⁸¹ In the dejected economy of Afghanistan, opium is the stand out product and the "*mainstay of the rural economy*".³⁸² Its consequences are felt beyond the borders of Afghanistan as it is estimated that around 93 percent of the world's illicit opium trade can be traced back to Afghanistan.³⁸³

³⁷⁶ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.185.

³⁷⁷ 'Major Donors Failing Afghanistan Due to \$10 Billion Aid Shortfall', *Oxfam* (25 March 2008) <<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/pressreleases/major-donors-failing-afghanistan-due-to-10-billion-aid-shortfall/?searchterm=None>> [accessed 27 October 2010].

³⁷⁸ James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Andrew Rathmell, Brett Steele, Richard Teltschik and Anga Timilsina, *The UN's Role in Nation-building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.239.

³⁸⁰ Svante E. Cornell, 'Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30 (2007), p.208.

³⁸¹ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.193.

³⁸² 'DFID Understanding Afghanistan: Strategic Conflict Assessment', *DFID* (November 2008).

³⁸³ Christopher M. Blanchard, 'Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy', *Congressional Research Service* (12 August 2009), p.2.

The majority of commentators have observed that narcotics have played a considerable role in the worsening security situation. Lieutenant General Sir Richard Shirreff argues that “*the trade is supporting terrorism and insurgency*”.³⁸⁴ According to Afghan intelligence, a massive 30 percent of Taliban income comes from narcotic related commerce.³⁸⁵ On this basis, it might be reasonable to assume that crop extermination is a security necessity. For this reason, some commentators like Jones identify the benefits of a tough approach to narcotics production.³⁸⁶ Conversely, other observers have stated that in a country where 70 percent live below the poverty line, it is strategically counterintuitive to deprive the population of the only consistent source of income.³⁸⁷ Practically speaking, there are also major structural obstacles to narcotics eradication. Shirreff notes how “*there are many in the Afghan government who make their money from the narcotics trade and therefore have an interest in its continuity*”.³⁸⁸ As this reveals, the narcotics issue in Afghanistan is hugely complex and requires a carefully considered strategy.

However, the counter-narcotics strategy has dithered on taking a concrete position. Initially Rumsfeld refused to acknowledge that the narcotics trade was even an issue.³⁸⁹ However in the face of soaring production, the U.S. strategy shifted towards eradication.³⁹⁰ This strategy was fervently opposed by the U.K. and Afghan government who preferred a more lenient approach.³⁹¹ Other NATO troops operating in drug producing regions decided to adopt an entirely neutral stance in relation to the narcotics trade.³⁹² The perplexing evolution of a non-strategy continued. Yet even when the strategy has more convincingly shifted towards eradication followed by crop replacement schemes, reports from the field suggest that farmers continue to grow narcotics relatively unimpeded.³⁹³

This issue merits more lengthy discussion than there is space for here; nonetheless there is general consensus that the strategy of *laissez-faire* towards narcotics has expanded the criminal industry and served the insurgent cause.³⁹⁴ The decision not to destroy the crop in order to avoid undermining the rural economy may well have been strategically prudent in the short term;

³⁸⁴ Lt General Shirreff, in discussion with author, 21 May 2009.

³⁸⁵ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, p.195.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, p.197.

³⁸⁷ Aras and Toktaş, ‘Afghanistan’s Security: Political Process, State-Building and Narcotics’, p.46.

³⁸⁸ Lt General Shirreff, in discussion with author, 21 May 2009.

³⁸⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.324.

³⁹⁰ Barnett R. Rubin and Jake Sherman, ‘Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication’, *Center on International Cooperation* (February 2008), p. 5.

³⁹¹ Sameer Lalwani, ‘The US’s Afghan Opium Strategy: Eradicating Any Chance of Stability’, *The Washington Note* (29 August 2007) <<http://www.thewashingtonnote.com/archives/002304.php>> [accessed 29 October 2010].

³⁹² Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.329.

³⁹³ Carlotta Gall, ‘Another Year of Drug War, and the Poppy Crop Flourishes’, *New York Times*, (17 February 2006) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/17/international/asia/17poppy.html>> [accessed 29 October 2010].

³⁹⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp.324-332.

however allowing the industry to explode without even a hint of management, or regulation, is a wholly different matter.

Summary – Social Development

The aid and development contribution to nation-building has a reputation of being perhaps the most virtuous component in the contentious discourse of interventionism. The current paradigm presupposes that rich countries must at least attempt to pull ‘failed states’ out of abject poverty. Mass protests, concerts and pressure groups reveal how the Western public has become overwhelmingly energetic in embracing philanthropy on an international scale. While this might discourage many in the public domain from publically criticising aid work, there are a number of commentators who question the grand strategic assumptions of aid and development programmes.³⁹⁵

Many of the issues facing Afghanistan that are identified above are symptomatic of aid and development’s failings in general. In a country that has rarely experienced effective governance it seems like strategic suicide not to prioritise the empowerment of local institutions for the long term. Yet after the overthrow of the Taliban, the post conflict strategy reverted to auto pilot as the aid agencies rolled in and took the reins while the Afghan government watched from the sidelines. A significant portion of the sparing aid that did make it to the government was frequently lost in the corruption and incompetence that is indicative of a ‘failing state’. This recurring balance between local ownership and aid effectiveness continues to be a strategic quandary facing the sector – unfortunately Afghanistan was no exception.

As Ghani and Lockhart observe, “*Good intentions are wasted without positive effects*”.³⁹⁶ This is very true, but even positive effects may also be wasted without local acknowledgement of progress. Aid agencies might be able to manufacture positive statistics, however the real opinions that mattered in a WHAM campaign were those of the local people. The evidence suggests that the Afghans were disillusioned and frustrated by the inadequacy of the aid strategy. As a result, the political legitimacy of the foreign presence and the Afghan government gradually deteriorated.

The final critique of the aid and development strategy is the most damning - the lack of commitment. When considering past interventions the contributions of donors in Afghanistan

³⁹⁵ For some well known examples see Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 1999), and Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can BE Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁹⁶ Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.107.

was measly by comparison. Afghanistan was one of the most destitute countries on the planet. Considering the scale of the development challenges facing the country, a dispassionate strategy lacking in attention and resources was strategically inexplicable.

Conclusion – ‘Steadfast in our purpose, now we press on’

As the nation-building strategy in Afghanistan 2002-2008 reveals; naivety, and neglect can breed great mischief. As can be seen, the strategy of 'light footprint', although rooted in a logical reading of history, was not intensive enough to facilitate the nation-building model in Afghanistan. By 2007, a National Security Council assessment of the war revealed that the strategic objectives set for Afghanistan had not been met.³⁹⁷ By the end of 2007, it became increasingly clear to many observers that Afghanistan was "*on the edge*".³⁹⁸

Broadly speaking, the 'light footprint' approach never had the potential to yank Afghanistan out of the perennial conflict spiral. These issues became even harder to tackle in the wider context of the strategic prioritisation of the war in Iraq. As the situation in Iraq worsened, the U.S. felt that Iraq had become the principal security concern while Afghanistan simply became the 'the other war'.³⁹⁹ The strategy of the U.S. at this stage is most appropriately summed up by Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff, who told US congress: "*In Iraq, we do what we must...In Afghanistan, we do what we can*".⁴⁰⁰ Given Afghanistan's complicated structural issues, this approach was simply not enough. It remains unclear as to whether a different strategy would have been enough to nip the insurgency in the bud and allow nation-building to enjoy a rare success. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that shifting resources elsewhere, ignoring established peacebuilding recommendations and failing to address the anatomic components of the country all contributed to the rapid deterioration of the intervention in Afghanistan.

There were also wider negative implications caused by the controversy over the war in Iraq. The overwhelming support for the intervention that had united the international community, and even the Afghans themselves, was now a distant memory. The uncompromising and brutish

³⁹⁷ "U.S. Notes Limited Progress in Afghan War: Strategic Goals Unmet, White House Concludes", *The Washington Post* (25 November 2007) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/24/AR2007112401333.html>> [accessed 29 October 2010].

³⁹⁸ John Godges, 'Afghanistan on the Edge: A World at Risk of Winning the Urban Battle, Losing the Rural War, Abandoning the Regional Situation', *RAND Review* (Summer 2007) <<http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2007/afghan1.html>> [accessed 29 October 2010].

³⁹⁹ While the struggle for Iraq climaxed, rhetorical depictions of Afghanistan as 'the other war' became popular among commentators and policy makers alike. For an example see Christian Parenti, "Afghanistan: The Other War", *The Nation* (9 March 2006) <<http://www.thenation.com/article/afghanistan-other-war>> [accessed 14 January 2011].

⁴⁰⁰ Admiral Michael G. Mullen, comment in Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, 'Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition', *Foreign Policy* (2009), p.43.

unilateralism that steered U.S. grand strategy over this period had drastically altered the narrative. Few in the international community became willing to join Bush's clique and "*the global wave of sympathy that engulfed the United States after 9-11 [had] given way to a global wave of hatred of American arrogance and militarisation*".⁴⁰¹ The ongoing difficulties experienced in Iraq, the widely disputed legitimacy of the intervention, a disdain for international treaties, and a hostile attitude towards what many saw as an overt contempt for democracy and the rule of law meant that the U.S. now found itself considered the greatest threat to international peace in some surveys.⁴⁰² It was reflective of a devastating political consequence – America had become ostracised by the international community.⁴⁰³

The strategy had also been one which was entirely monopolised by the notion of 'terror'. However, many in the international community felt that al Qaeda was 'small fry' alongside broader issues such as HIV/AIDS, pervasive global poverty, and longstanding intractable conflicts that made a significantly larger contribution to the global fatality register. Yet, all of America's foreign policy issues had become measured within the confines of the 'War on Terror'. Critics suggested that this overemphasis had such a throttlehold on the Bush administration that that the response had become hugely disproportionate to the actual threat.⁴⁰⁴

Yet even in terms of addressing the key issue of terrorism, the grand strategy fell far from the mark. It is widely acknowledged that a principal reason Islamic fundamentalism turned on the U.S. was because it assumed America was hostile to Islam.⁴⁰⁵ Despite the nominal public relations visit to a Mosque, there was very little in the U.S. grand strategy to dispel this assumption. Furthermore, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq quickly became an operational front for al Qaeda; somewhat ironic considering that there was limited evidence to suggest any notable presence of Islamic fundamentalism prior to the invasion. In addition, even though a major terrorist attack has yet to successfully take place on American soil since 9/11, noteworthy attacks have occurred in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Britain, Spain, India, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Indonesia and of course Pakistan, suggesting at least that the intervention in Afghanistan has done little to thwart the international reach of Islamic fundamentalism.

Furthermore, the tactics employed by the administration did little to negate the 'clash of civilisations'. In one instance, Bush went so far as to invoke the use of the term 'crusade' as a

⁴⁰¹ Arthur Schlesinger, comment in Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp.12-13.

⁴⁰² Ibid, p.4.

⁴⁰³ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, p.186.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p.188.

⁴⁰⁵ David Frum and Richard Pearle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), p.125.

reference to the 'War on Terror'.⁴⁰⁶ When combined with a foreign policy that plainly targeted the Muslim world, Bush's confrontational rhetoric which was designed to rouse American spirits, was just as effective at mobilising potential jihadists. Across the Islamic world, one poll dated in 2003 revealed that overwhelming majorities believed that Osama bin Laden would 'do the right thing', whereas the same poll showed that a low proportion of Muslims had any confidence in Bush.⁴⁰⁷ Figures on terrorist recruitment are nearly impossible to quantify. Nevertheless a number of commentators have argued that the 'War on Terror' has actually made the West less cosseted from terrorism and underpinned the global insurgency against Western governments.⁴⁰⁸

It was within this context that the intervention into Afghanistan descended into turmoil, accompanied by an ignominy courtesy of the wider grand strategy. Both domestically and internationally, the 'War on Terror' with its strategic emphasis on preventative self defence had taken a mauling and the intervention in Afghanistan became guilty by association. As Bush's second term reached its summation, the critics of the strategy had gathered like vultures. While some suggested that Afghanistan would remain on a permanent state of "*life support*",⁴⁰⁹ others were even less optimistic, asserting bluntly that "*for the United States, the war in Afghanistan has been lost*".⁴¹⁰ While the Iraq conflict eventually began to subside towards the beginning of 2007, it became apparent that the real battle for Afghanistan was only just beginning.

⁴⁰⁶ Andy McSmith, "Short attacks Bush for 'crusade' quote", *The Daily Telegraph* (21 September 2001) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1341188/Short-attacks-Bush-for-crusade-quote.html>> [accessed 10 January 2010].

⁴⁰⁷ "Views of a Changing World", *Pew Research Centre* (3 June 2003) <<http://people-press.org/2003/06/03/views-of-a-changing-world-2003/>> [accessed 10 July 2010].

⁴⁰⁸ Anonymous (later identified as Michael Scheuer), *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq* (New York: The Free Press, 2009), Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2004) and Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds*.

⁴⁰⁹ Ignatieff, *Empire lite*, p.110.

⁴¹⁰ Michael Scheuer, *Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq* (New York: The Free Press, 2009), p.115.

Overall Conclusion

The objective of this dissertation was to identify the principal strategic critiques of the intervention in Afghanistan between October 2001 and October 2008. By clarifying the key arguments, observers can begin to comprehend how strategic shortfall has ensured that the conflict in Afghanistan perseveres to this day. The intervention in Afghanistan has indeed become an 'Enduring Nightmare' and when searching for the empirical reasoning behind this, analysing the intervention from the point of view of strategy is a useful methodological tool.

Operational Strategy

The distinguished historian of the inter war period, Professor A. J. P. Taylor, when asked if one could learn from history, replied, "*Like most of those who study history [we learn] from the mistakes of the past how to make new ones*".⁴¹¹ Many of the issues the Coalition has faced in Afghanistan could have been predicted with a most basic reading of history. The inhospitable landscape, the ongoing failure to create a functioning state, the obstacles posed by a highly militarised society and the fierce resolve of the local people to resist all invaders – are just a few examples of Afghanistan's structural and historical issues that have perplexed strategists since Alexander the Great and have been reborn in a modern form to confront the U.S. and her allies. Afghanistan has earned a deserved reputation as the 'Graveyard of Empires', a strategic factor which surpasses all other considerations.

As if Afghanistan's troubled history was not enough to discourage intervention, then the wretched legacy of nation-building and counterinsurgency elsewhere should have been sufficient. Enterline and Greig argue that only two genuine success stories have graduated from the school of nation-building since 1945.⁴¹² Furthermore, statistics suggest that even though counterinsurgents seldom lose a tactical engagement, counterinsurgency has an alarming record for failure.⁴¹³ With Afghanistan, the U.S and their international partners selected one of the most challenging environments to conduct counterinsurgency and nation-building to date.

⁴¹¹ This famous quote is originally attributed to A. J. P. Taylor, 'Mistaken Lessons from the Past', *Listener* (6 June 1963).

⁴¹² By 'genuine success stories' this is reference to Germany and Japan – fully fledged democracies with developed economies. Enterline and Greig, 'Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan', p. 320.

⁴¹³ See D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) pp.22-27., and Jacques Cheminade, 'Algeria/Afghanistan: The Inescapable Failure of Counterinsurgency', *Executive Intelligence Review* (27 November 2009), pp.25-27.

The strategists apprehensively brushed aside such cautionary thoughts and descended on Afghanistan. The minimalist strategy, termed the 'Afghan Model', successfully achieved the objective of overthrowing the Taliban government. However the same strategy was inadequate at meeting the second objective of defeating al Qaeda forces in the field and eradicating all traces of the former regime. As Winston Churchill famously observed: *"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results."* On the surface the regime was gone, but the Taliban vestiges that survived the initial onslaught waited patiently in their safe havens and then returned to Afghanistan to settle the scores while the Coalition strategy remained fatally stagnant.

With the initial objective of regime change achieved, the strategy shifted its attention towards post-conflict reconstruction. However the U.S. administration opposed the idea of full scale nation-building, favouring instead a 'lite' or minimalist footprint. Both the political design and the aid and development strategy were short term in outlook, favouring high impact projects to the detriment of genuine long-term development, institution building and generating political capital. Driven by traditional nation-building objectives, the strategy was naively committed to extraordinarily ambitious targets that the deficient Afghan political system and intractable social-economic status quo refused to allow. This strategic miscalculation disheartened the local population and, coupled with a deteriorating security environment, the strategy fatally began to lose the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

Undermining this whole process was the incessant lack of security. An unwillingness to commit large-scale international peacekeepers and the inadequacy of local Afghan national forces left a security vacuum in the country that was quickly filled by multifaceted threats that varied from local warlords to drug barons, insurgents to terrorists. Simultaneously, the strategy critically failed to realise the significance of the 'safe havens' established in the FATA. With only a token international security presence in Afghanistan, and unable to rouse Pakistan into confronting the domestic threat it harboured in its western provinces, insurgency waltzed into Afghanistan to become a pandemic throughout the countryside. As the security situation degenerated at a serious pace, it became clear that the 'light footprint' operational strategy simply was too ethereal for the complex tasks of nation-building and counterinsurgency.

Grand Strategy

Just as some strategists after the rapid collapse of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein were tempted to proclaim U.S. grand strategy a resounding success, commentators would be well advised to steer clear of declaring the grand strategy from October 2001 to October 2008 an

unmitigated failure. The long-term implications of such a revolutionary strategy are likely to have effects for many years to come and the full understanding of the consequences will be best judged by greater hindsight. Nevertheless, to date there are three prominent criticisms of the strategy that have come to light.

The first of these was that the operational strategy in Afghanistan suffered as a consequence of the intervention into Iraq and the wider 'War on Terror'. Much of the logic behind the decision to use a 'light footprint' was necessary because Iraq had soaked up resources and shifted attention away from Afghanistan. As the situation in Iraq worsened, Afghanistan was relegated to a second tier priority as it became increasingly apparent that the U.S. 'grand strategy' had horrifically over-extended itself. Although far from being in the clear, whereas Iraq appears to be pulling itself out of the abyss, it would be fair to say this was achieved at the expense of Afghanistan - the country that truly bears the scars of this particular miscalculated hubris.

Secondly, even if the 'War on Terror' had remained limited to Afghanistan, it is implausible that the intervention in itself could have made anything more than symbolic contribution to the wider strategy of counterterrorism. The intervention in Afghanistan and the eradication of al Qaeda's training camps were designed to destroy the organisation, but it merely amounted to the 'strategic containment' of the traceable infrastructure.⁴¹⁴ Islamic fundamentalism is predominantly an asymmetric ideological movement without clearly identifiable command structure, geographical location or military hardware. Strategic targeting of such an enemy is challenging in the first instance and responding conventionally to an enemy that was entirely irregular is a strategy that was unlikely to yield definitive success. In yearning to deliver a discernable counter punch, the U.S. ignored one of Sun Tzu's key strategic principals: *"If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat"*.⁴¹⁵ Realising that the U.S. strategy misunderstood the nature of its enemy, it is wholly unsurprising that the threat of Islamic terrorism is as real today as it was on the eve of intervention.

Thirdly, if the intervention in Afghanistan was an inappropriate means of combating Islamic fundamentalism, the wider 'War on Terror' was seemingly counterproductive. A conflict against a multinational threat by its very nature necessitated international cooperation, nowhere more so than in the Muslim world. However, the 'War on Terror' possessed a conceited unilateralism that marginalised allies instead of encompassing them. Alongside allegations of human rights abuses, a disdain for international law, and the questionable legitimacy of the Iraq intervention, the narrative drastically altered as the global sympathy which arose in the aftermath of 9/11 became a distant memory. For bin Laden and his allies, the U.S. grand strategy graciously reinforced some

⁴¹⁴ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p.322.

of their key arguments and perpetuated Islamic grievances against the U.S.⁴¹⁶ From boutique European cafés to the tribal lands in Pakistan, the grand strategy inadvertently afforded America to amass more opponents than it had started with. These three principal criticisms help explain the limitations and inadequacies of the U.S. grand strategy from October 2001 to October 2008 in relation to Afghanistan.

The Intervention in Afghanistan – Implications for Strategic Analysis

The methodology of a strategic critique provides a useful analytical tool for commentators to assess the effects of implemented policy in its entirety. In most cases this type of research will reveal a framework of strategic ‘lessons’ that are applicable in one or another case. Significantly, these lessons may reveal trends about individual countries, particular types of conflicts, population groups and so on. As a result of this, the knowledge gained from strategic critiques plays an important role in informing the policies and strategies of tomorrow. Not only do strategic critiques identify the key issues with the strategy in question, but they can also reveal important information about the practice of strategic approaches in general. The case of Afghanistan has significant contributions in this regard.

Most obviously, the example of Afghanistan reveals the significance of the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ dynamic in strategic design. In the introduction to this dissertation, the definition of strategy is described as the *“the way in which the available means will be employed to achieve the ends of policy”*.⁴¹⁷ Between October 2001 and October 2008, the intervention in Afghanistan demonstrates that if a strategy fails to meet the criteria of this very basic definition, the strategy is unlikely to yield significant success.

From a grand strategic perspective, the strategy that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 was the most radical and proactive expression of U.S. foreign policy in 50 years.⁴¹⁸ Yet for all the resources that were committed to the ‘War on Terror’, significant components of the strategy were misdirected from the threat that was actually faced. Although terrorism and insurgency was nothing new to Washington, there appeared an uncomfortable unwillingness to combat security threats outside the realms of traditional Cold War paradigms. For these reasons, the West’s military ‘means’ was overwhelmingly shaped by the traditional assumption that security is

⁴¹⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (London: Filiquarian Publishing, 2006), p.15.

⁴¹⁶ Scheuer argues that “[Bin Laden’s] hatred and war-making have nothing to do with our society, values, and ideas. Bin Laden hates us...because of our policies and actions in the Muslim world”; Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris*, p.159. Richard A. Clarke writes that the ‘War on Terror’ acted as *“the greatest recruitment propaganda imaginable [for al Qaeda]”*; Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, p.264.

⁴¹⁷ Owens, ‘Strategy and the Strategic Way of Thinking’, p.111.

⁴¹⁸ Gaddis, ‘Grand Strategy in the Second Term’, p.2.

maintained through deterrence by way of overwhelming conventional superiority. Yet in a war against terrorists there is rarely an observable strategic enemy to meet in the field. Therefore the operational utility of these forces was seriously flawed. As far as the 'means'/'ends' dynamic is concerned the grand strategy demonstrated the calamity of using inappropriate and misdirected 'means' towards unachievable 'ends'.

From an operational perspective, the failings of the 'means'/'ends' component were more rudimentary. The strategic shift away from regime removal and towards rounding up al Qaeda and latterly the task of nation-building were, by the objectives they required, far more complex processes. Yet paradoxically, while the objectives became unconventional and more ambitious, the strategy never committed one or other resources and attention to match this development. This was an elementary error of strategic design where the 'ends' were rapidly multiplying whilst the 'means' were reducing. It is for this reason that the blueprint of Afghanistan will serve as an unforgettable example of what can go wrong when a 'strategy' neglects its most basic constituent parts.

The case study of the intervention in Afghanistan also provides some useful insight into how the conceptual boundaries of strategic analysis have broadened from traditional approaches. For Clausewitz, *"The aim of war in conception must always be the overthrow of the enemy"*.⁴¹⁹ Yet when stripped of the rhetoric of politicians, the intervention in Afghanistan is one example of how the art of stratagem can no longer assume a clear end state. Today's strategic outcomes are frequently more politically and culturally defined than they are militarily. Consequently, the objectives in modern strategic approaches are better understood as the pursuit of a particular conceptual space from which an acceptable political outcome may be achieved.⁴²⁰ Even when a condition for this conceptual space has been met, it may take even more endeavour to maintain that condition. For this reason a successful 'strategic outcome' for the US and her allies in the modern world is unlikely to be clarified by clear strategic 'ends' such as 'victory and conquest' but by ambiguous outcomes that are broadly shaped towards the preservation of the West's hegemony and the status quo.

Alongside greater ambiguity of objectives, the intervention reveals how the 'means' employed in a strategy are now similarly less definitive in their effect. For all the tactical victories such as building schools, running elections and successfully vanquishing enemy forces from the field, ultimately there is still no guarantee that the tactical level of activity will enable operational or grand strategic success. Conversely, whereas insurgents and terrorists rarely experience tactical victories, their strategy of piecemeal provocation has proven to endure the test of time.

⁴¹⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1997), p.351.

Furthermore, to argue that success could have been achieved in Afghanistan solely by means of addressing the issues outlined in the strategic critique would be a very bold claim indeed. The complex strategic environment of Afghanistan reveals that the available 'means' at the time might not have existed to ensure the desired 'ends'. As a result, a strategy for a strategy's sake, even in perfect design, may not be the dependent variable in guaranteeing policy outcomes.

The question for strategists will be how to adjust to these developments within the context of security threats in the modern world. This in itself is an unnerving task. Yet it is further complicated by the domestic context in which modern strategies are concocted. When a foreign policy issue may require intervention, Western societies have a tendency to demand immediate, cost effective and definitive solutions. Indeed the structure of Western military resources, shaped and moulded to achieve rapid and decisive victories, reflects this requirement.⁴²¹

However, the intervention of Afghanistan reveals how this characteristic of the West's approach to security has been operating in a vacuum that is divorced from the reality of the security threats it predominantly faces. Unfortunately for strategists, the intervention in Afghanistan demonstrates that in the case of asymmetric warfare, rarely is an outcome so straightforward. From the Balkans to Iraq, intra-state conflicts dominate the narrative and have an intractable timeless character which cannot always be resolved by the 'quick fix' solutions demanded by Western publics. As the casualties mount and the costs increase, the consequences of a military intervention can overstep the boundaries of what civil society will tolerate. Once this reaches a level of political unacceptability, a withdrawal in some form is inevitable. This prevalent factor implies that the West might be lacking in the resolve to guarantee successful objectives in low intensity but enduring conflicts. As a consequence of this dynamic, 'staying power' capacity has become the most recent of the crucial considerations for today's strategists.

As Afghanistan nears the end of its third strategic phase, these broader considerations relating to strategic approaches are just as important as the 'lessons learnt' from strategic critiques of the intervention. Consequently the 'enduring nightmare' of the intervention in Afghanistan will have lasting implications for strategists. The U.S. and her allies have been subjected to a healthy dose of humility. Hubris, naïveté and neglect are the most damning indictments on any strategy but unfortunately, over the period covered by this dissertation, they are also the most evident strategic deductions. For reasons that are related to the chosen strategy, and for reasons that are extraneous, from October 2001 to October 2008, Afghanistan failed to emerge from the intensive care unit. With all the wealth and conventional military superiority of the U.S. and her

⁴²⁰ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p.270.

allies, the intervention will serve as an important case study of the West's inability to apply a strategic model that will guarantee successful policy outcomes in complex asymmetric warfare and nation-building.

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⁴²¹ This strategic approach for rapid and decisive victories first came to the fore in the early 90s and was coined by the media as the as the Powell Doctrine. For an insight into this strategic approach see; Harlan Ullman and James Wade, *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (Washington DC: NDU Press, 1996).

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